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Sporting Days

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By JOHN TAINTOR FOOTE

SPORTING SKETCHES
BROADWAY ANGLER
HELL CAT
DAUGHTER OF DELILAH
CHANGE OF IDOLS
FULL PERSONALITY
FATAL GESTURE
TRUE'S DIARY
POCONO SHOT
A WEDDING GIFT
THE SONG OF THE DRAGON
THE LOOK OF EAGLES
DUMB-BELL OF BROOKFIELD
THE LUCKY SEVEN
BLISTER JONES

Sporting Days

By

John Taintor Foote



Illustrated by Arthur D. Fuller

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The Blighting of Jeptha

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HERE SHE CAME CRAWLING ALONG BEHIND ME.

THE BLIGHTING OF JEPHTHA

A MAN'S first love may easily have been a redhead, with a copious sprinkling of magenta freckles. She may have been a sprightly lady with match-stick underpinning and a generous endowment of buck-teeth. In the matter of the female form divine, it is certain that she ran chiefly to arms and legs or vaguely suggested a Christmas plum pudding. Even so, who can recall her cherished lineaments, the shrill cadence of her voice, the angular or rotund contours of her person, without a wistful sigh, a warmth at the heart, a sudden quickening of the pulse?

A similar nostalgic yearning comes to most of us at the thought of our first shotgun. It was, in all probability, a single-barreled weapon, chambered and bored, after a fashion, for 20-gauge shells, with a kick that left a still-scrawny biceps richly black and blue. The assemblage of this haphazard specimen of the gun maker's art was of such a dubious nature that to "break" it required what looked like a strain-

ing attempt at hari-kari or it flipped open with suspicious ease.

Be that as it may, who can dream of that once-venerated symbol of the chase and the god-like power it placed in one's hands over the life-span of unsuspecting red squirrels, chipmunks and even the too-slothful rabbit, without a softening of the inner man quite as devastating as the recollection of a daring peck in the cloakroom?

The answer to both these questions is to be found in the person of one Jep Sparling, a fairly reliable plumber when, as he says, the notion takes him, but an indispensable companion if one wishes to know what coverts of Westchester County, New York, the evasive timberdoodle, mate and offspring, will favor, as rest-rooms, in their uncertain journey southward.

I am prepared to swear that thoughts of his first girl and his first gun leave Jep completely cold. I am forced to this conclusion because of a recital of certain facts, pertaining to the past, which he recently divulged. With a pair of setters reproachfully intent on each morsel of lunch that passed our lips, he spoke as follows:

"Will I ever forget my first shotgun? Brother, I never will. I'll remember that corn-shucker as long

got stren'th to twitch a trigger finger. I came
ss this outrage by reason of collecting nine
two hundred and seventy-five thousand and
odd soap coupons and delivering enough milk
at half a cent a quart to amass and forward, together
with said coupons, the dizzy sum of six bucks to a
bunch of racketeers, then in the mail-order business,
at Kansas City, Missouri.

"In due time back she came, and for a couple of
months I slept with her. No kidding, I used to take
that gun to bed with me so nobody could steal her
in the night without killing me first. She was a 16-
gauge single-barrel, weighing right at 8 pounds, that
handled like a post-hole digger. I was twelve, going
on thirteen, at the time, with nothing to bother me
except my old man, who could lay a razor strop, that
he'd made out of a heavy harness trace, spang on the
seat of my pants with a dexterousness that would of
surprised you. I don't recollect ever seeing his equal
since.

"Not that the old man was too numerous with
that strop. I could get by with the average amount
of orneryness, including corn-silk cigarettes, with
just warnings; but there was two things I had to do.
One was milk our cow, and the other was to be at
the schoolhouse before the morning bell stopped

ringing. That cow got milked and I got educated—or else.

“At that time I was sappy as a spring maple over a female child of the name of Luella Tansy that lived up our street and around the corner till you came to the first house past the blacksmith shop. Our pasture lot ended at Luella’s back yard. I’d hang on the pasture fence, summer evenings, and make a noise like a hoot-owl, which was the signal for her to come out and scream and dodge at low-flying bats while I explained what a great guy I was.

“After the gun came I put in an evening telling her how I was practically going to exterminate the partridges and rabbits from our section of the state when fall came around. I promised to take her with me on a few big hunts. I said I’d let her carry the game. She dodged at a bat that was twenty feet above her head and said, ‘Oh, thank you, Jeppy!’ and that was that.

“The fall got there after a while, but so did school. It put a terrible crimp in my plans to massacre the game for miles around. It was against the law to shoot on a Sunday, and for four straight Saturdays it rained. Right after that I came down with the mumps, and that saved our fur and feathers from destruction for another three weeks while I

stayed in bed and ate what I could chew—which was chicken soup.

“They sent me back to school on a Monday. Late Tuesday evening old man Carr, that owned a farm about nine miles out, brought a load of fodder in for our cow and told me there was a wild goose on Amber Lake and why didn’t I go out there with my new gun and see if I could get a shot at it.

“If he’d told me a grizzly was loose in the woods, it wouldn’t have given me a bigger jolt. Geese didn’t stop in our section—they just stream-lined it on through, ’way up yonder; but I’d laid in bed and heard ’em go over, and just the sound of ’em would make my heart thud like a pile-driver. I’d jump up and tear for the window and flatten my nose against the window-pane, trying to get a sight of them buglers; and do you know, I’ll do the same right now.

“Well, something had to be done about this sky-cruiser out on Amber Lake—that was certain. I couldn’t count on a wild goose being enough interested in my schooling to wait till Saturday; so I figured the crisis called for a relapse from scholarship. In short, I aimed to play hooky next day.

“I went into the house and got my gun and some shells, and sneaked ’em out and hid ’em in the

fodder. I didn't sleep much that night. When I wasn't seeing myself drawing a bead on that honker, I was thinking about just how the razor strop felt after the old man got the range and windage doped out and began to find center with every shot.

"Next morning I started off in my school suit with my books under my arm, as nice as you please, but I circled back and put the books in the cow manger and hauled my gun and shells out of the fodder and beat it across the pasture, heading for the road to Amber Lake.

"Well, who should be out in her back yard, with an armful of stove-wood from the wood pile, but Luella. She asked me what I was doing with my gun, and I told her I was going hunting. She said I didn't have time because the first bell had rung already. I threw a chest and said I had more important things to think of than school bells. Then I gave her the big news. I told her I was going out to Amber Lake and shoot a wild goose.

"Before I could stop her she dropped the stove-wood and over the fence she came. She said, 'A wild goose! Mercy goodness! Lemme go with you, Jeppy—aw, please!'

"Did I let her go with me? That was forty years

ago and, brother, I still get sort of low and feverish when I remember that I did.

"It was better than six miles to Amber Lake, and we hoofed it all the way. We followed the branch-line railroad for about three miles. I skipped a tie at every stride to show I was a man. It took some stretching, and pretty soon my leg muscles began to ache, but I kept right at it. Luella patted along, hitting a tie to each step, or else walking a rail with her hand on my shoulder.

"The toughest part of the trip was the trestle over Red Horse Rift. It was safe as a church, but if you looked down between the ties you could see the river running fifty feet below, and Luella began letting out squeaks and saying it made her dizzy.

"I'd got her half-way across by holding her arm and taking it slow when she squeaked and stopped dead and said what if a train should come along. I told her this was just a branch with only one train a day that came by around noon. She said how did I know, and I told her everybody knew it and that I had walked the trestle thousands of times and to quit being a scairt-cat or I'd leave her where she was. That brought her along, all right, but she kept watching up the track like she expected a train to sneak around the bend on her any minute and she

kept saying she wished she hadn't come. I said I wished it a darn sight worse than she did, and she said I wouldn't feel so smart if God sent a special train down that track on account of us playing hooky.

"I didn't hardly expect to find any wild goose on the lake by the time we got there, which was close to eleven o'clock, but there he was, right in the middle, with his long black neck poked up like a stick of licorice. Did I get a kick out of seeing him setting out there? Brother, I did! I watched him through some blueberry bushes for fifteen or twenty minutes, just looking at him. Then I began to study what to do.

"Now that I saw him I was crazy-afraid he'd get up and be on his way any minute. I didn't know enough to figure he was probably gut-shot, or he wouldn't of been there in the first place. I thought he'd just took a notion to set out there all by himself, and I thought up a kind of prayer. I said, 'Oh, God, please keep him settin' till I get a boat.'

"The boat I had in mind was an old flat-bottom thing that I knew about from fishing for bullheads. It was down at the end of the lake, last time I was there, and we went around to that end, and there she

was, in all her glory, about to sink from an overdose of rain-water.

"I tried to pull her up on shore, but all I needed for that was a couple of good willing mules that would lay right down to it; so I waded in and tilted some of the water out of her and went to bailing with a worm can I found under a seat. It was a small-size baking-powder can holding maybe half a pint. By the time I'd got the water out of her I don't think I could have raised my gun up to shoot if the goose had swum down to watch me work.

"I rested a spell and thought things over. I'd heard enough about wild geese to know I couldn't row out to this one and blaze away. It looked like the only thing to do was to get up-wind of him and lay down in the boat and see if I could drift close enough to get a shot. Not so dumb for a 12-year-old—if you ask me. I don't know but what I'd handle the proposition the same way right today.

"The trouble was, the boat was at the down-wind end of the lake and I had to get it up pretty near to the other end. I told Luella what I aimed to do and she said, 'A boat ride! Goody!' and hopped in.

"Have you ever rowed a flat-bottom horse-trough without any keel three miles against the wind, trying to hug the shore and miss snags and keep your eye

on a goose—all at the same time? I ain't never done it since, and it's going to be a long time yet before I do. I remember Luella kept asking me why we didn't go faster. I don't know but what I hold that against her as much as anything that happened.

"When both hands was solid blisters—most of em broke—and my back-bone felt like it would splinter if I moved quick, I'd got about five hundred yards past the goose. He hadn't stirred a web that I could see—just sat there with his neck up, waiting for my next move.

"I rowed out till I was dead up-wind of him, and pulled in the oars and told Luella to lay down flat. She wouldn't. She said if she laid down in her school dress in that dirty, wet boat her mother would kill her. I had to push her down and step on her, I remember, before I could get her to do it. Then I crawled forward to the bow and laid down myself.

"There was a crack where the top of the side-board's had pulled away from the bow piece, and I kept my head down and watched the goose through that. As we drifted down to him he strained his neck to get his head up another inch, but he never moved. I expect we got about sixty yards from him.

was beginning to kind of dent in the gun stock and barrel with my fingers when Luella spoke up. She

said it was 'way past dinner time and she was awful hungry.

"Well, the goose went away from there. Them big wings of his began smacking the water till he got a couple of feet above it. Then he flapped down to the other end of the lake and pitched. I told Luella she could sit up now. That's all I told her. It wasn't any place to really tell her, because if I had started to get her told right I'd of throwed her overboard.

"What helped save Luella was me being so busy watching where the goose lit, which was in the narrow end of the lake about thirty yards off from a patch of reeds. That was the key to the situation—them reeds. All I had to do now was to go around the lake to where they were and crawl across a open space to 'em and let him have it. It seemed like a two-mile walk would be a pleasure after rowing that boat; but when I'd got at it, I knew I'd done things I liked better.

"That side of the lake was mostly hemlock swamp. By the time you've gone a ways, stumbling over sunk logs and stepping into bog holes, you begin to get sort of discouraged. It liked to killed Luella. I tried to make her sit down on a stump and wait for me, but she said she wouldn't stay alone

in the swamp for two million dollars on account of there was bound to be snakes in a place like that. Luella was afraid of a lot of things, but snakes was her special dread and horror.

"By the time we got to the edge of the hemlock, just in from the open space behind the reeds, she was whimpering like a sick puppy. I told her to stay where she was while I got down and crawled to the reeds, but the snake idea still had her. She said she'd rather crawl a mile than have a snake drop down from a tree and crush her to a pulp or sink his fangs in her and kill her dead with poison.

"I said all right she could crawl out there with me, but I said if she let out so much as one whisper I'd push her down out of sight in the swamp and throw stones on top of the body. She said I wouldn't dare do such a thing on account of they'd hang me for it, and I told her I wouldn't care if they did if she scairt that goose again. When I got down and started crawling for the reeds, here she came crawling along behind me, being mighty careful to cut out the whimper I'd been hearing for the last hour.

"Well, the bare spot turned out to be bog, mostly. By the time we got to the reeds Luella needn't have worried about what laying down in the boat had

done to her dress, and the only thing I could of used my school suit for was cleaning out the cowshed.

"We got to the reeds all right and worked through them nice and careful. The wind was making 'em rattle, and that helped a lot. I crawled till I saw the shimmer of the lake through the reeds. I raised up slow and easy, and there he was!

"Brother, that was sumpin! I could see the white band under his throat and the black on his head and neck and the gray feathers on his back and wings. I could even see one of his little round eyes—he was that close. He looked like my meat, but my heart started to try to jump right out of me and I began to shake till my teeth rattled.

"I waited a minute to steady down before I poked my gun ahead of me through the reeds. I got on my knees by easy stages and cocked the gun. It sounded like somebody had dropped a sledge on a anvil, and I missed two full breaths and five or six heart-beats till I saw the goose hadn't moved. I was drawing down on him when Luella turned loose a scream that raised my hat right up off my head and stood every hair straight out from the back of my neck. I found out afterwards that what we called a mussrat in them days had drug hisself across one of her legs.

"I doubt if a Iroquois with a scalp-knife, in times

past, ever brought a shriek that would of matched Luella's out of any female's chest. Every muscle I had jerked tight, including the one in my trigger finger. The gun went off and kicked me over backwards on top of Luella.

"When I got up, Mr. Honker was down the lake a couple of hundred yards, eight feet up in the air and getting higher. He kept on working for altitude till he could clear the trees at the other end of the lake, and over them he went and on out of sight. He must have been a sick goose, but I guess Luella's scream and that gunshot right in his ear had scairt him so bad he plumb forgot it.

"You'd of thought that would of been all from Luella for that day, but it wasn't. I'd got her to the branch-line trestle on the way home, with her crying most of the way about her dress being ruined and missing her dinner and how tired she was and what-not. When we were pretty well out on the trestle, a train whistled on the main line over the other side of the hill, and Luella let out another screech. It didn't hold a candle to her mussrat effort, but she threwed her arms around me at the same time and knocked the gun out of my hand. I tried to make a grab for it, but I couldn't get Luella unwound from me in time, and I saw the gun bounce

one of the rails and slide between the ties and end over end down into Red Horse Rift.

It was beginning to get dark, and I was too beat to think about making any more moves that day; I proved right there I was a well-meaning boy, always trying to do the right thing. Instead of pushing Luella after the gun, I just gave her one little in the pants and took her by the neck and chucked her the rest of the way across the trestle. When I got home, Mother took a look at my old suit and came close to tying Luella's all-time -and-screech record. Then she said, 'Oh, Jeptha, Perkins was over about you not being at school y.'

The old man didn't say much. He just got a look of a far-away look in his eye and said, 'I milked Jerse myself.' Then he crooked a finger at me and led the way to the preserve and pickle room, which was always the scene of major operations. I don't know what followed was another all-time record. I know the old man never equaled it again myself that I can recall.

I went out to Red Horse Rift again next day, just after school, and took off my clothes and crawled out and felt around with my feet till I stubbed

my toe against the gun. Then I ducked under and got hold of her and brought her to shore.

"After I'd got dressed and had quit shivering enough to put in a shell, I started to hunt some on the way home. I was after rabbits especial. I didn't come across any, but I did see a screech-owl setting in a walnut tree back of the cowshed right in our pasture. I drawed a bead on him and touched her off.

"Well, I don't know what happened to the screech-owl, but I've got a kind of general idea what happened to me. I got this nick in my ear and this here dent-like on my left hand and a furrow in my scalp that you could still see the scar of if it wasn't for the hair.

"The gun must have lit muzzle down when she fell from the trestle, and a lot of Red Horse Rift was clay bottom that would plug up a gun barrel as tight as a cork. At any rate, when I came to, I was setting on the ground with quite a lot of gun left. That is to say, I still had the stock and half the barrel.

"A couple of days after that Luella appears outside my window. I couldn't see her good on account of bandages, but I could hear her all right. She said, 'Yoo hoo, Jeppy! Mother says I can't go with you any more.'

"I was still pretty shaky, but I wasn't so weak but what I could get up out of bed and get to the window, which I did.

"I said, 'Listen, Luella. You go on home and tell your mother that her and I have the same ideas exactly.'

"Well, let's go and kill us a couple of woodcock. I'll give these two sandwiches to the dogs. You, Fan! Stay away from that! Look, will you! The big mallet-head has went and let her take his sandwich from him. Don't it beat hell what a poor dumb he will stand for from a she!"

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Dog Upon the Waters

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I CARRIED HER TO SHORE.

DOG UPON THE WATERS

MYRTLE is dead. Poor funny, little snipe-nosed Myrtle. I left her, bored to extinction, at a gun club in Maryland. Between shooting seasons, life to her was a void. It consisted of yawns, the languid pursuit of an occasional flea, the indifferent toying with bones and dog biscuits and a mournful, lackluster gazing at fields and thickets near by.

During these dreary months she was never chained or confined in any way. Self hunting, which spoils so many gun dogs, did not affect Myrtle. Occasionally, when the dragging days became more than she could bear, she would betake herself listlessly to quail cover, find a covey, point it for a moment, flush it and watch the birds whirl off into the pines. She would then return, sighing heavily, to a twitching nap somewhere around the clubhouse.

She must have perished during one of these efforts to break the monotony of existence in a gunless world, because a letter from the club steward tells

me that she was caught in a muskrat trap in the big marsh and drowned. The big marsh is perhaps a half mile from the clubhouse.

Drowned! Except for Chesapeake and a spaniel or two, I never saw a better swimmer. And yet, in preventing a similar tragedy, she became my dog, body and soul. Also I learned to sniff audibly when scientific fellows announce in my presence that animals cannot reason.

And now, I fear me, I shall have to divulge a secret that has been closely kept for many a day. I am about to spread reluctantly on the printed page the one formula for securing the kind of quail dog that fills an owner with unspeakable joy from dawn to dark, year in, year out, come heat or cold, or drought or rain.

It has nothing to do with sending a check to a professional breeder and then waiting, all expectant, for a shipping crate to be delivered at one's door. It has nothing to do with raising endless litters of distemper-ridden puppies. If you want the rarest, the most perfect instrument for sport in all the world, and not the average plodder and flusher of commerce or home industry, stick to my formula. I set it down exactly as it was given to me by a wise man of the South many years ago.

Here it is: "A Georgia cracker will sell anything—his land, his mule, his house, his wife. By God, he'll sell a bird dog—a real one, I mean. Just show him cash money and he'll reach for it."

These words—after I had learned their true significance—accounted, some years ago, for my spending a winter in Atlanta. My string of gun dogs, so my handler told me, had petered out. I was looking for another string, and Atlanta is the clearing house for information about noteworthy setters and pointers located in the various counties of south and central Georgia where the most quail and, *ipso facto*, the most good gun dogs are found. Working out from Atlanta by motorcar, as rumors of dogs that knew their business drifted into town, I had secured four pointers. I had shot over perhaps fifty dogs in selecting them. The four were all fast, wide-going, covey finders. Class dogs are good for about three hours at top speed. I, therefore, had a pair for mornings and a pair for afternoons, but I needed something that would stay in closer and go slower and find singles—an all-day dog—to back up my four whirlwinds.

One evening a voice spoke over the telephone—a voice that I knew well. The voice said: "Listen. The foreman of our bottling plant was down below

Macon last week. He got plenty birds. He's been telling me about a little setter bitch he saw work that sounds like what you're after. He says he can fix it for us to go down and shoot over her next Saturday. What say?"

"How far is it?"

"'Bout a hundred and twenty miles."

"Does your foreman know a good dog when he sees one?"

"Yep!"

"What does he say she's like?"

"He says she's a ball of fire."

"Doing what?"

"Finding singles—coveys too."

"All right, have him fix it."

Thanks to that telephone conversation, my glance rested upon Myrtle for the first time about eight o'clock the following Saturday morning. She came cat-footing from somewhere behind a paintless shack, set in three or four acres of cotton stalks, at her master's whistle.

I took one look at her. Then my eyes swung reproachfully to the bottling-plant foreman who was responsible for, and had accompanied us on, a one-hundred-and-twenty-mile drive to see her.

"Never you mind," said he stoutly. "You want a bird dog, don't you?"

I did want a bird dog. I have ever been contemptuous of him who goes gunning with a silky-coated, bench-show type of setter calculated to drive a sportsman to undreamed-of heights of profanity with one hour's work in the field. But this specimen before me was—well, I felt that I could never bring myself to admitting the ownership of such a dog.

I had been told she was little. She was. She did not weigh much more than twenty pounds. She had a wavy black-white-and-ticked coat that gave her a claim on the setter family. Her muzzle was so pointed that her head suggested the head of a fox—a black fox—except for a pair of drooping bird-dog ears. Her tail was short, clubby and without any flag. She carried it drooping and a bit to one side. Her eyes were the yellow fox eyes that belonged in such a head. Her gait, as she had come loping to us, seemed more cat than fox, but it reminded me of both.

Delicacy made me omit the opening of the ritual expected at such a time. "How's she bred?" was never spoken. I inquired without interest about her age.

"Comin' three. Reck'n me an' you better stay together, an' yoh friends hunt their dogs."

"All right," I agreed feebly. I was in for it! A-hunting we must go!

And a-hunting we did go. My friend and the bottling-plant man with two of the former's dogs in one direction; my hapless self, with the unspeakable little setter and her lanky owner, in another. She had been named Myrtle, he told me, after his old woman. I had caught a glimpse of the "old woman" through the door of the shack ere we set forth. She was all of sixteen.

We walked in silence up a lane, and so came to fields and promising cover. "Get along, Myrt," said my companion, in a conversational tone, and Myrt drifted to our left into some high grass and disappeared. We found her presently, perfectly still, looking without particular interest straight before her. "She's got birds," I heard. And this, indeed, was true, if our finding a covey twenty yards ahead of her proved it. Accustomed to the tense rigidity on point of more orthodox shooting dogs, Myrt's method was disconcerting.

I shall not attempt to describe that day—my first day afield with Myrtle. She found, in her cat-fox fashion, twelve coveys, as I remember. After each

covey find, she proceeded to point and promptly retrieve, when killed, every scattered bird of every covey—or so it seemed to me. And the day was hot, and the day was dry. Incidentally her master shot rings around me.

Her final exhibition that evening would have settled my desire to call her mine if she had not already won me completely hours before. We had joined my friend and the bottling-plant foreman. They had found two coveys and a few singles, had killed four birds, and my friend's pair of pointers were the apple of his eye.

"There just weren't birds in the country we worked over," my friend explained.

I saw the owner of Myrtle open his mouth to speak, then close it resolutely. We started down the lane to the house, my friend, with his dogs at heel, in the lead; Myrtle, cat-footing behind her master, in the rear.

The dusk had closed in softly about us. It was already too dark for decent shooting. The lane down which we plodded had a high wire fence on either side, with pine woods to the left and a flat, close-cropped field to the right.

Suddenly I heard a whine behind me. I stopped and turned. Myrtle was trying to squeeze through

the right-hand wire fence to get into the field beyond.

"Birds out yonder," said Myrtle's owner.

I called to my friend and explained.

Now his dogs had just passed that way without a sign. Also, the field was almost as bare of cover as a billiard table.

"Out there!" he snorted. "Wait till we get back to Atlanta. Maybe we'll find a covey in the middle of Five Points."

Perhaps I should say here that Five Points is to Atlanta what Trafalgar Square is to London.

Myrtle's owner met the insult by picking her up and dropping her over the fence. She went straight out into the field and stopped.

There followed an exhibition of fence climbing against the watch by my friend and the bottling-plant foreman. They managed to scratch down two birds from the covey that roared up in the gloom somewhere out ahead of Myrtle.

Thirty minutes later she was stretched out on the back seat of the car on her way to Atlanta, too tired to wonder where she was going or with whom.

She cost me—steady, gentlemen, don't throw anything; just observe the workings of the formula—forty dollars. The amount was simply spread care-

lessly before her owner. The result was inevitable.

And so I became the owner of Myrtle. But that was all. I made a point of feeding her myself. I brought her into the house and begged her to accept my favorite overstuffed chair. I petted her fondly. She accepted food and chair without enthusiasm. She barely submitted to the caresses. She was not interested in a mere owner. She wanted a master. She wanted the lanky cracker—that was clear. As to the matter of forty dollars changing hands, she completely ignored the transaction.

Having endured a few days of this, I accepted an invitation to go down with one of the best quail shots in the South to shoot with friends of his near Americus. I wanted birds smacked right and left over Myrtle. I wanted her to see shooting that was shooting, with the lanky cracker far, far away. This, I felt, might aid her perception of property rights. I loaded her into the car then, among a reassuring welter of gun cases, shell boxes and shooting coats, and, lest she be distracted while learning that forty dollars is forty dollars, I left the four whirlwinds straining at their chains, yelping prayers and curses after me, as we drove off.

Eventually we reached a plantation house and its broad acres, over which we were to shoot, to be

greeted by two tall brothers who owned it all. A mincing, high-tailed pointer, who seemed to be walking on eggs, and a deep-muzzled, well-feathered setter helped to welcome us. They were a fine-looking pair of dogs. I opened the rear door of the car and Myrtle came forth.

Now our hosts were true gentlemen of the South. After a look at Myrtle, they spoke earnestly of the weather and the crops and of how hard it was to get hold of good corn liquor. The crack shot from Atlanta became absorbed in assembling his gun. All in all, the moment passed off well.

In due time we marched out over the fields, four guns in line. We had planned to separate into pairs when we reached wider country. This we never did. I do not like to shoot with more than one other gun. I wanted the crack shot to help me kill birds instantly and stone dead when Myrtle found them; but, in a surprisingly short time, the brothers showed little desire to leave us, despite their pair of dogs ranging splendidly through the cover.

Myrtle, as we started, had run whining from one man to another for some moments. At last she stopped to stand and watch the other dogs quartering out ahead. She turned and looked deliberately at, or rather through, each of the gunners, myself in-

cluded. Then with a last small whimper, she got to work. It became clearer and clearer from then on that the place to kill birds that day was in the vicinity of Myrtle.

That miniature, misbegotten what-not found covey after covey and heaven knows how many singles. Her work was marred, however. When a bird fell, she would find it at once and pick it up. She would stand uncertain for a moment and whimper, then start with the bird in her mouth for the nearest man. Having visited all four of us, she would begin to move in a vague circle, whining and looking about. Once she dashed for a high black stump in a field, to return dejectedly with the bird still in her mouth.

I blew my whistle at such times. She never seemed to hear it. I would go toward her, calling her name, and ordering her to "Bring it here!" She only retreated from me, whimpering as I advanced. Getting to her at last, I would take hold of the bird and persuade her to let go of it. All this took time. It was also, to me, her legal owner, somewhat mortifying.

I shared my lunch with Myrtle. She accepted a sandwich, then withdrew a little from the rest of us, to stand looking off into the distance. Suddenly she was away like a shot. I looked in the direction she

was going and saw a Negro field hand working along the bottoms, gun in hand, looking for rabbits. I blew and blew my whistle. She rushed on. When close to the Negro, she stopped, looked at him, and came slowly back to where we sat. I rubbed her behind the ears and along the back. She submitted, gazing off into space.

Later that afternoon a covey scattered in a narrow thicket along the bank of the river. The river was in flood—a wide, tawny plain with hummocks of fast water in the middle and still reaches of backwater at its edges.

Myrtle pointed a single within inches of the water. The bird, when flushed, swung out over the river. The deadly gun from Atlanta cracked. The bird came down in the backwater just at the edge of the current. Myrtle was in the river swimming for the bird the moment it fell. She got to it quickly, but an eddy or the wind had carried it out into the current. As she turned to come back with the bird in her mouth, the force of the river took her, and downstream she went.

There was a bend just there, curving away from our side. We four stood helpless on its outer rim and watched her work slowly shoreward, going downstream ten feet for every foot she gained toward

the backwater and safety. I remember yelling "Drop it, Myrt—drop it!" knowing that she could make a better fight without that wretched bird. She did not obey. She struggled on until she came at last to the backwater with the bird still in her mouth.

We all breathed sighs of relief and watched her swim swiftly toward us when free from the drag of the current. "Good girl! Bring it here!" I called, and got out a cigarette with shaking fingers. I began to bask in exclamations I heard along the bank: "Hot damn! That's the baby!" And "Come on home with the bacon, gal!" At least I was her owner.

But trouble swiftly met that small swimmer. There were cat briers growing below her in the flooded ground. One of the longer of these through which she swam fastened in her collar—the new collar I had bought her only the day before. Swim as she might, it held her fast. Her stroke became less smooth. She began to paw the water with her front feet—splashing as she did so.

My shooting coat, filled with shells, came off and in I went. No swimming, I found, was required. I was no more than up to my armpits in icy water when I reached Myrtle. For this I was duly thankful.

Myrtle was showing fright and exhaustion by now. She was no longer swimming. She was dog-paddling

frantically to keep her head above water. The quail was still in her mouth.

I disengaged the brier from her collar and carried her to shore. Then I sat down to empty my hunting boots. I thought I felt the rasp of a pink tongue on the back of my hand as I did so. I can't be sure, for I was pretty cold.

The day was well along and my bedraggled state demanded the plantation house and a fire. We started toward both, hunting as we went.

I was at the left end of the line. Myrtle stopped on point, out in front and to the right. It was evidently a single, since flushed birds had gone that way. I called, "Go in and kill it!" And stood to watch the shot.

The bird fell at the report of the gun. Myrtle went into some brambles to retrieve. She emerged with the bird in her mouth. "Bring it here!" I heard from the man to whom it rightfully belonged. If Myrtle heard him, she gave no sign. Nor did she give that whimper of uncertainty that I had heard throughout the day, as she had stood with a recovered bird in her mouth. She came to me on a straight line, running eagerly, to lay the dead quail in my extended palm. Her eyes had that look—half pride in work well done, half love and faith and companion-

ship—which is characteristic of a shooting dog as a bird is brought to the master's hand. "Here it is, boss!" that look seemed to say. "It's yours. And I am yours—to slave for you, to adore you, as long as I shall live."

Although my teeth were chattering, I was warmed suddenly from within.

Myrtle rode back to Atlanta that night, curled in my lap, a weary but contented little dog.

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The Diver Does His Stuff

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I BECAME AWARE THAT MY GALLERY HAD NOT
DESERTED ME.

THE DIVER DOES HIS STUFF

Now that concrete roads beribbon the country in all directions and motorcars are filled with a smooth determination to sneak up to seventy while you tell your fishing pal the latest non-parlor story, the natives, along even the more remote trouting waters, regard a dry-fly angler, fully panoplied for the chase, with a lack of interest that amounts to complete apathy. In these later times the countryside has become aware that the first spring blossoms will bring a migration of such creatures to each wadable trout stream in the wake of the state hatchery fish truck; that, despite their appalling appearance, they are as harmless as the shitepoke and the teeter snipe whose haunts they invade, and that they will depart, as mysteriously as they came, with the last of the mosquitoes, leaving behind them only the raucous chuckle of the more persistent kingfisher to rise above the hum of the river.

There was a day, however—alas, it will never

come again—when fish trucks were as unnecessary as they were unknown. In that delightful era children fled screaming into the schoolhouse, the cheeks of country maidens blanched with dread, farmers reached for the old double-barreled standing behind the door at the sight of a strange figure, apparently in the last stages of dropsy, shod in a pair of average-sized canal boats, making ponderously for the nearest creek.

Somewhat later, suspicion of a pair of animated elephantine waders and what-not changed to amusement as the word went around that these were not demented, deep-sea divers stalking inland, but only honest citizens of somewhat larger communities “got up for fishin’.” Later still, particularly among the younger males of the hinterland, derision gave place to a certain amount of curiosity as to how anybody rigged out like that conducted himself on a trout stream.

It being well known that a pair of rubber boots, a pole, a line, a hook and some night-crawlers were all that were needed to secure an ample panful, why did anyone get into such duds and go swinging an elongated buggy-whip up and down-stream to catch trout? Was it just a city notion or was there something in it? Maybe, with those funny-looking clothes

and shoes and gadgets, you could catch bigger fish.

In those days, one could be sure of a half-skeptical, wholly absorbed gallery if one fished a bit of water which allowed the boys of the neighborhood an uninterrupted view of the proceedings. Also, I must add, with a sigh, one could be reasonably certain of producing, for the edification of the spectators, the rise and capture of several fat, butter-yellow brownies or the less wary, olive-and-black scarlet-spotted brookies to be slipped, without too much ostentation, into one's creel.

And now let me say that there are experiences in the life of every angler so tragic, so bitter, so filled with regret that for years and years recollections of them will set him to tossing in his bed and muttering in his sleep. I propose herewith to record, as best I can, such an experience. I do so with pain and anguish.

In a year long since past, along the lower stretches of a Sullivan County river, my fishing companion and I parked our car at the edge of the state road and slid with some difficulty down a shale embankment to the water's edge. We had read, not long since, La Branche's *The Dry Fly on Fast Water*, and profited thereby. Mr. La Branche had not succeeded in mak-

ing purists of us, however. If they were rising, we fished upstream with the floating fly; if no trout were breaking, we fished downstream with the sunken variety. Many years, on many trout streams, have not caused me to alter this procedure.

We were, accordingly, fully accoutered with all the clothing and accessories for both wet and dry fishing. We wore waders and wading socks and shoes, of course. Our fishing jackets were cut to meet the tops of the waders, a hand's breadth or so below our armpits. Abbreviated as these garments were, their designer had still contrived to endow them with an unbelievable number of pockets. They contained front pockets, side pockets, back pockets, outer and inner pockets, pockets within pockets. Somehow we had discovered and managed to make use of them all.

In consequence, from a point well above the waist down to our gargantuan wading shoes, we presented an appearance of alarming obesity. Thanks to fly boxes, leader boxes, an oilskin raincoat, pipe, tobacco-pouch, etc., which stuffed our precious pockets to the bursting, we jutted and bulged from this point upward in an unexpected, not to say startling manner, until, at last, the whole was crowned with a disreputable hat that served at once as a head-

gear and a sort of pincushion for variously colored used flies.

Other details of the ensemble were fishing scissors, dangling on a string which went around the neck. A leather-bound bottle of fly oil with brush fastened to the breast of the jacket. A metal rod holder sewed to the bottom of same. There was, in addition, a 20-inch creel, the size made necessary by the fact that we didn't want to bend the big one that we hoped and prayed, each time we entered a stream, would rise and be taken.

To the creel was tied a heavy metal "priest" to put out of business the long-looked-for monster, together with lesser fry which came our way in the meantime. Our nets—small, easily handled affairs—were snapped to a ring sewed in the back of the jacket between the shoulder-blades. They were also fastened to the ring by a stout cord, lest they be dropped into some hurrying river when unsnapped and in action.

As to my fishing companion of those days. He was noteworthy for two things: an extraordinary ability to take trout and an apparent lack of balance while doing so. This latter characteristic was accounted for by the fact that the intensity with which he fished caused him to forget all else, including where and

how he set his feet on slippery or rocky stream beds. As a result, he was apt to advance between casts in a series of alarming gyrations that, now and then, were the forerunners of appalling and complete immersions.

I called him, in consequence, "The Pelican, or Great Diver," shortening his full title to "The Diver" on less formal occasions. As for him, he addressed me by a wide variety of dubious given names, none of which was ever, by any chance, my own.

Having arrived at the river's brim, dressed as above, on the day I am describing, we were confronted by a rush of foam-flecked water smoothing out as it became the green depths of a pool. The shadow of an iron bridge lay across this pool. Beyond the bridge, on the far side of the stream, a small hamlet clung to a plateau from which rose abruptly a cloud-piercing, wooded hill.

I should perhaps mention here that a somewhat bitter, though concealed, rivalry existed between The Diver and me as to whose creel would prove the heavier when night came on. It was our habit to make a show of giving the other fellow the best pool or rift, wish him all the luck in the world, and then sneak off, find better water if possible, and, as The Diver put it, "Try to make a sucker out of him."

With the above precedent in mind, The Diver, on that far day, addressed me as follows: "Well, Oswald, pick out what you think is good—above, or below, or this stretch here. Take your choice."

Adhering to our formula, I promptly declined the offer.

"I had a better day on the Broadhead than you did," I reminded him gently. "You take what you want."

A faint cloud passed across The Diver's face.

"You sure tied into 'em over there," he said with reluctant admiration. "But listen, Elmer, it was coming to you after what I did to you—I mean after your tough luck up on the Ausable." The Diver's eyes roamed up and down the stream, noting its character and possibilities. "This is a swell pool, Mortimer, and that rift looks good. Suppose you take a crack at it here, and I'll go above and see what it's like up there."

I had crowded an ordinary day's work into the morning, and had driven the car all the way up from New York that afternoon. The sun would not be long dropping behind the hills, I noted. It seemed best to start fishing at once and where I stood, rather than to go searching laboriously for more promising water.

"All right," I decided. "If it's all the same to you, I'll start in here."

"Suits me, Egbert. I'm on my way." The Diver waved a courteous rod. "Hope you get 'em, Gus." He strode off up-stream.

I took a coiled dry-fly leader from between the moist pads of a leader box and placed it for a more thorough soaking in a miniature bay at my feet. As I straightened up, a voice shrilled out above me.

"Pete! Oh, Pete! Lookit!"

A boy's face was staring down upon me over the railing of the bridge. It was joined by another and another. Presently there were four young faces in a row, observing me with a mixture of scorn and amazement.

"Lookit them pants and them shoes."

"Them's to git in the creek with."

"Must be figgerin' to git in up to his neck."

There was a general suppressed titter.

"Hello, boys," I called.

"H'lo," said one.

The rest said nothing. They simply continued to take in my bloated and bulging person in rapt silence.

Suddenly the faces disappeared, and I heard high crescendos of mirth coming from somewhere above. I was greasing my line when the faces reappeared

to watch the process with the same wondering attention that previously they had bestowed upon me.

They watched me finish my line-greasing and put the line-greaser back in my coat. They watched me tie on the leader and tie a dry fly to that. They watched me take the brush from the oil-bottle and carefully coat the fly. They watched me cleanse the leader of any possible oil or grease by drawing it through a cake of leader-soap.

They watched all this in round-eyed silence save for an occasional breathless "Lookit." Now and then it was too much for them. The faces would disappear like one, and shrieks of laughter would come to me to mingle with the chuckle of the more rapid water at the top of the pool.

At last, all being ready, I waded in. Conscious of the critical eyes staring down upon me, I must admit to shooting out an unnecessarily long line on my first cast and dropping that dry fly like a languid bit of thistledown well up the pool. I had elected to fish dry because I had seen the splash of a rising trout out of the tail of my eye while making my preparations. Now, for the benefit of my gallery, I proceeded to give an exhibition of what I regarded as expert casting.

I worked slowly up the pool, shooting out a long

dexterous line with hardly a ripple marking where it fell. There was no longer any laughter on the bridge. My rod-wielding was being accorded a close and, I think, respectful attention.

But nothing came of it. I forgot the gallery in my efforts to raise a fish. I worked to the top of the pool, then on up into the rapid water, using shorter, less dwelling casts. A half hour passed, and I was still fishless. Then I saw The Diver execute a deft three-quarter turn-and-stagger just at the head of the rift. He was coming down-stream, fishing wet. Since the ridge above the hamlet had already taken a jagged bite out of the blood-red sun, it was time I followed a good example.

In changing to a looped wet leader, with one tail fly and a dropper, I became aware that my gallery had not deserted me. They had kept me under observation by following along the state road as I had worked up-stream. They seemed undaunted by my failure to produce results. Their attention was as swerveless as heretofore. Now and then I could see lips move, but the roar of the fast water in which I stood drowned their comments, whatever they might have been.

These faithful followers were blotted out of existence, so far as I was concerned, a moment later.

On my second cast down-stream there rolled up from the very middle of a deep slick between two froth-rimmed boulders the biggest brown trout I had ever seen. His mouth opened like a cavern as he engulfed the dropper fly.

Years have passed since then, as I have said, but I can still visualize that great head and the huge unhurried roll of him as he turned and went down with my Wickham's Fancy. How he contrived to seem leisurely about it in the press of that fast water is beyond me, but he seemed to dwell for seconds on the surface of that slick. It was as though he had risen in a pond.

The whole thing had the unreality of a dream. I had fished a good stretch of water with a variety of dry flies without a sign of a rise. I had fished this particular slick not five minutes before, and then waded along its edge—enough to put even a callow fingerling on his guard. The dropper fly was, to all intents and purposes, on the surface, and yet this wise old grandfather who had scorned the previous offerings I had floated over him had seen fit to come up and take it. Such is the nature of trout, and of such are woven the uncertainties, disappointments and unexpected rewards that go to form the inimitable pattern of an angler's day on a trout stream.

I tightened instinctively, mentally bracing myself for the shocking violence of granddad when he felt the hook. Strange to say, his resentment was so mild as to be negligible. He simply sank unhurriedly down to the bottom to become as moveless as the two boulders that caused the slick in which he lay.

For perhaps fifteen minutes there he stayed, quite oblivious to all the pressure I dared use, the light snell of that Wickham's Fancy and its No. 12 hook considered. Meanwhile the sun had definitely abandoned Sullivan County, New York, for a 12-hour period, and the rushing water all about me was taking on unbelievable lavenders and pinks and purples at which one could only strain one's bedazzled eyes. It was already a bad light in which to net even a 12-incher and, so far as I could tell, granddad seemed prepared to continue resolutely doing nothing until midnight or beyond.

In my extremity I thought of The Pelican, or Great Diver. I glanced upstream and saw him about a hundred yards above me, making his perilous way down the rift, casting as he came. I let out an old-fashioned hog-calling welkin-ringer, and he responded with a banshee's top note signifying that he would be with me shortly.

A lot of water ran—not over the dam but between

and past my legs before he at last came near enough for me to make myself heard above the splash-gurgle-roar that made up the song of the rift. He was spattering casts to right and left of him between side-slips, skids and some steps from a chorus routine.

"Quit that damcasting," I yelled, "and get here quick."

"Whas-a-matter, Filbert?" he yelled back. "Are you snagged?"

"Listen, fool, I've got the God-awfullest trout on that you or I or anybody else ever saw. Hurry!"

As I waited for him to cover the yards, which seemed like miles, to where I stood I saw my gallery, still in attendance, watching me from the road with a strained attention that showed their interest in the situation to be supreme.

Another of their kind appeared on the bridge and observed the absorbed group on the state road.

"First bat for one ole cat," he shrilled.

The gallery remained entirely loyal to me and my affair of the moment.

"Forget it," one of them screeched back. "This guy's hooked a terrible big fish."

The newcomer hastily abandoned all thoughts of

light diversion. Emitting a wild rebel yell, followed by a series of Indian war-whoops, he galloped to the scene and became as immersed in watchful waiting as the rest.

The Diver having arrived at my side, we now went into conference. It was decided that he should get below granddad and sneak up on him from the rear. He laid his rod on the bank and proceeded to execute this maneuver, net in hand, squinting down into the slick at the point where my rigid leader disappeared into the water.

"Can you see him?" I yelled.

"I can see something. It looks like a—"

The Diver never finished that sentence. In leaning forward and down in an effort to pierce the multi-colored surface with his gaze his equilibrium forsook him. He waved both arms and the net rapidly in the air for an instant ere he executed a combination jack-knife and full-twist into the middle of the slick.

I am still of the opinion that a purple knob on his forehead which he later displayed was not, as he claimed, the result of a collision with a stone embedded in the river's bottom. I have ever maintained that either his head crashed into the broad and stubborn back of the indignant granddad, or, as I ex-

plained to The Diver, "He may have slapped you with his tail."

The moments immediately following The Diver's exhibition of his art were, like The Diver's waders, filled to overflowing. He floundered to his feet, but long before he was once more erect, net still in hand, I had seen the leader cut through the water as it passed up and around one of the boulders. The remorseless strain on my rod was gone.

Speechless, hopeless, undone, I stared mournfully at the emerging Diver. And then—oh, joy! oh, rapture!—I felt the vibration along the rod that only a swimming fish imparts. I frantically stripped in slack. My heart surged as the rod tip bowed again toward the surface of the stream.

"He's still on!" I yelled. "There—just ahead of you. Net him!"

Once more The Diver peered dutifully into the slick with water from his hat brim running into his eyes. He passed a dripping sleeve across his face and peered again, then plunged his net below the surface. He brought it up with an eight-inch chub, fast to my tail fly, writhing in its folds.

I stared stupidly at the bewildered Diver holding that pitiful minnow up for my inspection. There was a thunderous silence. At last he spoke.

"K-k-k-kidding me," he said as the temperature of trout-stream water in early May reached for his bones. "K-k-k-kidding me. Just a g-g-grade A louse."

And now there arose, well above the noise of the rift, the most abandoned shrieks of laughter that I had ever heard. My gallery, no longer able to stand, were rolling in paroxysms on the state road. I have heard boys made helpless through the hysteria that seizes a class of youngsters after some hours of too-rigid schoolroom discipline; but that was nothing compared to what the appearance of that despised chub in The Diver's net did to those Sullivan County urchins. They took this to be the antagonist that had held me for twenty minutes in the rift and forced me to call wildly for aid. This was what all the clothes and gadgets and preparations at the bridge had led to—an eight-inch chub. It all but slayed them.

Retreating to the car, I showed The Diver the snapped snell of my dropper fly that had parted at granddad's first rush like a single strand from a fine-haired maiden. I explained to him that the chub must have taken the tail fly as it swung in the current at the stern of the stationary leviathan. At last he was disposed to admit that he had not been the victim of a foul and repulsive deception.

"Didn't you see him at all?" I asked.

"No, P-P-Percival. I saw something down there that l-l-looked like a log, but it was as long as my l-l-leg."

"That was him," I assured The Diver. "He was longer than your leg."

As we drove sadly away from that fatal stretch of river, beginning now to reflect here and there the pale fires of the first stars of evening, my erstwhile gallery were still pawing weakly at one another and emitting exhausted cackles along the edge of the state road.

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My First Depression

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THE BLUE PYLE'S LEGS BEGAN TO MOVE IN A
SORT OF PAWING MOTION.

MY FIRST DEPRESSION

HAVING lost, as the saying goes, "everything," I have acquired a reputation for cheerfulness in the face of disaster that troubles me. I have been told that the way I take it is "simply marvelous."

It has been so long since I have taken anything—it has been so monotonously, since 1929, a matter of having it taken away—that the sentence is misleading from its very beginning. However, let that pass. The main point is this: I have no urge to leap from the tower of the Empire State Building, or less spectacular if equally destructive heights, because I became, many years ago, completely immune to economic loss. I was engulfed at that time by a disaster so overwhelming, a catastrophe so numbing in its effect that the horror of our present depression, as indicated by the disappearance *in toto* of my tangible assets, leaves me comparatively unmoved.

I relate the following facts, therefore, to avoid any further undeserved encomiums by friends and

neighbors over what appears to be an admirable stoicism on my part, but which, in reality, is only the indifference of one who is, so to speak, beyond all suffering.

The scene goes back to my earliest years of manhood, or better perhaps, of late adolescence. At that time, I was, for some unaccountable reason, studying art. This fact has no significance. It does establish a locale—namely, Cincinnati, Ohio—and brings out the point that I was dependent on an allowance from home which paid my board, tuition at the art school and left me about twenty dollars each month to spend as I saw fit.

Cincinnati is directly across the Ohio River from Covington, Kentucky, and this is important, because in those dim, dead, delirious days, one could not fight chickens in Ohio without the possibility of annoying activity by lurking minions of the law, whereas, within the more sportive borders of the blue-grass state just to the south, one could.

I cannot recall what moved me to journey across the bridge leading from Cincinnati to Covington to witness my first cock fight. I do know that I was so stirred, so thrilled by what I saw, that Saturday nights thereafter were apt to find me making the pilgrimage to the cockpit in Covington with the one

dollar necessary for admittance somehow safe in my pocket.

There is now no single spot in this land of the free and the home of the brave where game cocks may be allowed to slake their thirst for battle. The situation contains a statutory paradox. It is largely the result of pressure upon our legislators by those who seek to prevent cruelty to animals. Cruelty, if you please! Worthy gentlemen, sympathetic ladies! A game cock embraces combat with the ardor and delight of a girl at her first ball. In depriving this gallant fellow of his fisticuffs, you have undone him. His crow has lost its note of joyous challenge. The bright, wild fierceness of his eye is dimmed. He was a happy warrior who might hope to die splendidly before admiring thousands. He is now a rooster who has his head whacked off in some unspeakable back yard, and is then stuck in a pot.

I have digressed. We must return to Cincinnati and youthful indiscretions. A certain, long-drawn-out, rather mournful, fellow art student—called Reedy by his intimates—was, at that time, the companion of my joys and sorrows. Whither I went, there went Reedy. What he saw in me I do not know. I was attracted to him and valued his presence chiefly because he had been endowed with the most

amazing Adam's apple that my fascinated gaze has ever dwelt upon.

One never, I remember, looked into Reedy's countenance during a pertinent conversation; one glued his eye to the telltale Adam's apple, thus probing to the bottom of his soul. If Reedy was unmoved, the Adam's apple remained as steadfast as an ancient landmark; if he were vaguely disturbed or slightly interested, it gave a premonitory quiver. But in moments of stress, when the inner man was racked by emotion, Reedy's Adam's apple slid up and down like the hand of a trombone player during a passage requiring the extremes of virtuosity from that instrument.

Reedy did not accompany me on amorous adventures. The explanation is simple. I once—and only once—took him to call on twin sisters whose pulchritude was proclaimed by the entire male population of East Walnut Hills. As we departed later that evening, the twin other than my own took me feverishly aside and begged that I never bring “that boy” there again. She explained that she had a raging headache, due to—she hesitated, found her word, “eyestrain.”

Be that as it may, Reedy, without noticeable enthusiasm, followed me cautiously into this new world

gaffs and game cocks at a primary cost of one lar a week. These disbursements would not of mselves have been insupportable, but worse was follow. It is part of the ritual of cockfighting that : backs one's choice of birds in coin of the realm. Now, Reedy and I had no reasonable choice in matter of game cocks. We knew absolutely hing about them. And yet—up to the last dime our resources—that dime being irrevocably lgeted for car fare—we were carried away by excitement of the rapid betting that preceded h fight; and selecting one of the birds about to joined in combat, because we liked his looks or or, or the manner or face of his handler, we gered prayerfully.

The result was inevitable. One must be in the ow, to use the vernacular of the pit, before oing to profit at a cocking main. Reedy and I rays took our last dime sadly away from the kpit and took the street car back to Cincinnati, ing lost between us anywhere from two to six lars.

Came a night, however, when the big idea vned. It held forth a promise of better things. was preceded by an exhibition, brief as the draw- of one's breath, which left those present secure

in the knowledge that providence had seen fit to produce at last, from a mere egg, a Juggernaut, a tornado, an utterly destructive force.

The occasion was the testing and selecting of Ohio birds that were to be fought in an interstate main the following week against the best game cocks of Kentucky. There appeared sometime during the evening a shambling old man, a well-known breeder and handler, who held in his arms a heeled stag—i. e., young cock, with gaffs on—that he was about to pit. Now, handlers, as a rule, have nothing whatever to say. At this point, however, the old man spoke up. He addressed the assemblage at large. "Gents," he said, "this Blue Pyle stag that I'm goin' to put down ain't never been pitted before. Watch him!"

It will now be necessary for me to describe briefly the orthodox method pursued by game cocks when entering into battle. A pair of birds are put down by their respective handlers at opposite sides of the pit. Their fierce, golden eyes have already fastened upon each other. As they find themselves free and on their feet, they begin a rather stately, seemingly cautious, approach to the center of the pit, not front to front but at an angle which suggests that they are walking and will come together sideways. When

separated at last by only a foot or so, they whirl together and go into the air breast to breast, each shuffling—as the rapid striking with their legs is called—at the body of the other.

The unexpected, rather astonishing words of his handler that night quite naturally focused the attention of all of us on the small Blue Pyle he held in his arms. We had time to notice that, as he was being lowered to the floor of the pit, this young cock's legs began to move in a sort of pawing motion. Whether he was already mentally on his way or was simply feeling for the ground with his feet, I do not know. At any rate, when dropped the last few inches by his handler, he lit running and was across the pit like a flash. When about three feet from the other cock, he brought his wings into play and left the ground. Rising like a plane taking off, he crashed into his unprepared adversary and bore him completely over and back against the pit wall, his shuffle sounding like the roll of a muffled drum as his gaffs found the head and neck of the bird beneath him. The old man walked across the pit and picked him up. He crowed once and settled down quietly in his handler's arms. The other cock lay moveless—dead ten times over—dead even as he was being flung back against the pit wall.

There followed, I remember, an almost complete silence. In it the old man spoke up. He said, "Boys, in case you think that was a fluke, I won't unheel him. We'll just take on any four-pound-six stag that's here tonight—give or take two ounces."

Although I have never before or since seen a bird pitted twice in the same night, the old man waited with the Blue Pyle until a suitable adversary was heeled and brought in, whereupon we witnessed the identical drama—Sudden Death of an Orthodox Game Cock by a D'Artagnan of the Gaffs—that we had viewed a few moments before. Its author again crowed, once, when his brief masterpiece was over.

Tumult arose around that cockpit. The assemblage yelled, swore, stamped and beat one another on the back. Glancing at Reedy, I took the accomplishments of his Adam's apple to be a sign of the emotion of the moment shared by all. I was presently undeceived. Reedy, it seemed, had a plan. He confided it to me when the noise had subsided. It was this: Death and destruction, in the form of the Blue Pyle, would undoubtedly appear in the main against Kentucky the following week. He proposed that we raise, during the next seven days, "a lot of money," as he put it, and then wager the whole magnificent sum on this one and only certainty among fighting cocks—

"and not," he added, "piddle away so much as a nickel on anything else."

My acceptance of Reedy's suggestion, though brief, was enthusiastic. I said, as I remember, "Kid, you're on!"

There followed a week of financial activities for Reedy and me. It was, however, not without its dreams. We saw ourselves, after Saturday night, affluent beyond our heretofore wildest hopes. Surfeited, so to speak, with riches. The getting together of "a lot of money" called for and received Herculean efforts. We borrowed right and left, promising on our sacred honors to make restitution the following Sunday. We pawned our overcoats, our watches, a pair of silver-backed hairbrushes—Reedy's—a pair of chased gold cuff links—mine—two leather suitcases, a mandolin, a guitar, our evening clothes and every suit we possessed except the ones on our respective backs.

When we made our way to the cockpit in Covington on Saturday night, we had one hundred dollars, which I was carrying in a roll in my left hand, the hand being inserted deep in a trousers pocket. "Don't," Reedy instructed me, "take your hand out of that pocket till the time comes."

I nodded dumbly.

What followed was largely the result of a trivial detail. We happened to take seats on the Kentucky side of the pit and found ourselves beside an elderly, soft-spoken Kentuckian, who greeted us pleasantly with "Howdy, boys!" and presently began to share with us his boundless knowledge of cocks and cock-fighting. He had been a breeder of game birds in his earlier days, and had followed cockfighting, so he told us, for more than forty years. He knew every handler from Kentucky intimately. He knew every bird that Kentucky put down that night, and what might be expected of him. His astoundingly correct prophecies as to the probable outcome of various fights left us dazed. He would say, for example, "Now, that Black Breasted Red there is one of Newt Chamberlain's birds over near Paris. They're not flashy fighters, but they're cutters. They kin lay on their backs and cut a cock to pieces above 'em. That there stag Newt's putting down is mighty likely to win." Whereupon Reedy and I watched a spectacular Ohio cockerel shuffle all over the Black Breasted Red, seemingly outclassing him. As the fight wore on, however, Ohio became steadily less brilliant. He grew slower and slower. At last he began the telltale rattle in his throat that indicates deep distress. Presently he laid him down and died.

"Thought so," said our friend softly.

Reedy and I exchanged awed glances.

"That's a Henny-Aztec cross of Bud Schermer's going down now," spake the oracle presently. "Don't like 'em. All fireworks and no punch. 'Spect he'll be a sick chicken pretty soon."

He was—very!

About many battles our friend ventured no opinion as to the outcome. "Well, I wouldn't know—tough fight," he'd say, shaking his head. But when for some inscrutable reason he thought a bird "ought to win" or was "likely to lose," that bird somehow proceeded to do so.

Thus the night wore on with my hand still firmly clasped about our hundred dollars.

At last the oracle leaned forward in his seat, observing with lighted eyes a cock that had just been brought in. He said suddenly, "Boys, do you ever bet?"

We admitted that upon occasion we had been known to do so.

"Well," said the Kentuckian, his eyes still on the gray bird nestling in his handler's arms, "that's one of Purcell's Dominicks. They're the best strain of birds in Kentucky. They're the best strain of birds in the world. They come out of the egg knowin' how

to write their names with a pair of gaffs, and they're dead game. They kin lay uncoupled on the floor and take a beak holt and kill a cock. I've seen 'em do it. This'll be next to the best bird fought here tonight. The best one is his full brother. He's coming on later. Boys, I don't want to talk you into nothin', but I'd advise you to bet a piece of money on that Dominick."

I half withdrew the hundred dollars from my pocket and looked at Reedy.

The Adam's apple remained steadfast. His "You know what we said" was unnecessary.

"But listen," I pleaded, "it isn't as though we're betting the way we used to. He hasn't been wrong yet, has he?"

"Not yet," said Reedy.

"Then why should he be wrong now?"

"I dunno. But I gotta get back my clothes and my mandolin and my hair-brushes. I can't take chances."

"But don't you see," I urged, "we could bet the whole two hundred dollars on—you know what."

"Too late," said Reedy. "There they go!"

And there, indeed, they went. Or rather the antagonist of the Purcell Dominick went somewhere. He went straight to whatever place is assigned in

the hereafter to good game roosters who die trying.

"Yep," said our mentor, "they'll do it every time."

"Now I hope you're satisfied," I told Reedy.

An hour of just cockfighting went by while we waited for our big moment, our great reward. The hundred dollars was almost pulpy in my sweating palm. At last a gray bird appeared in the pit on the arm of his handler. He had the head of a silver snake, with golden, fiercely gleaming eyes below a thin blood-red ribbon of comb.

"Boys," said the Kentuckian, "here's the other Purcell Dominick I was speaking about. The cock don't live that can kill him."

"Reedy!" I pleaded in agony. "Reedy!"

I got the signal I wanted from Reedy's Adam's apple and had turned to the pit before I heard his husky "All right!" in confirmation.

I raised my right hand in the teeth of the Ohio side and called out, "One hundred dollars on Kentucky!"

I was astonished by a forest of waving arms that grew instantly where there had been none. I heard in a sort of daze a swelling chorus, "I gotcha, bud!" "I gotcha, beau!" "I gotcha, fella!" A stocky, red-faced man pointed a stumpy finger at me to help

fasten my eyes on his. "Listen, kid! I gotcha!" Confused by so many waving arms, deafened by the sudden clamor, hypnotized by that urgent, stumpy finger, I nodded to the red-faced man a confirmation of our wager.

And then unspeakable horror overwhelmed me, for there strolled into the pit the same shambling old man of a week before, and on his arm was the Blue Pyle, the steel gaffs on his long, slender legs showing clean and bright against the dark of the handler's coat.

I can close my eyes and see those gleaming, needle-pointed gaffs today. It was as though they were about to penetrate my own vitals, or had already done so, for I was the victim of a sudden all-gone feeling in the stomach and I felt cold sweat break out on my forehead. I emitted a groan of anguish.

The old Kentuckian leaned forward and stared into my face.

"What's the matter, son," he asked, "are you sick?"

I said, "Oh, gosh!" and became speechless.

I heard a white-faced Reedy explaining in gasps: "You see, mister—we brought a lot of money over here—to bet on that chicken. Oh, a lot of money,

mister—and he's awful! You don't know. He's awful!"

And then a feeble hope stirred somewhere within me, for the oracle from Kentucky gave a reassuring chuckle.

"Why, boys," he said, "you ain't got a thing to worry about. That Dominick 'll go 'round that Blue Pyle like a cooper round a barrel. He'll just naturally whip hell out of him. Wait and see!"

So we waited. And never have moments seemed so like leaden hours as in that brief interval before the handlers stepped to opposite sides of the pit to put the two birds down.

As I look back on it, I can feel thankful for one thing. We were not kept long in suspense as to the result. I feel certain that my pounding heart could not have stood a desperate encounter between those two in which the God of battle favored first one and then the other.

There is, therefore, some consolation in the fact that the Dominick was destroyed as instantly, as completely as though struck by a bolt from the blue. D'Artagnan, the unorthodox, again lit running, again flashed across the pit, again shot planelike into the air to find a dead cock between his heels when he landed. He then crowed—once.

I am a mere author. I am no matchless word painter, ready to perform wizardries in hyperbole, simile and metaphor. I shall, therefore, not attempt to describe the action, following that shrill, triumphant crow, of Reedy's Adam's apple.

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Old Joe

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POOK DEVOTED A MOMENT TO SCRATCHING HIS
KINKY GRAY DOME.

OLD JOE

JAY NORTON WITHERSPOON was, until recently, what I shall call a synthetic sportsman. A resident of Westchester County, New York, his gun room was at once the envy and despair of those who were allowed to behold its treasures. Within its cabinets were dully gleaming rows of walnut stocks fastened cunningly to expertly bored shotgun barrels of various makes, lengths and gauges. If you cared to do so, you could take up a gorgeous weapon, here and there, snap it to your shoulder and swing it from right to left or vice versa with Jay Norton's full consent and approval.

One noticed, however, that the Witherspoon back premises contained only a greenhouse and an impressive three-car garage. There were no kennels, with runways, in which fretful pointers or setters muttered maledictions over their inactivity and cursed the aching void that engulfed them between seasons.

This was because Jay Norton's scheme of life

made such querulous dependents unnecessary. He had begun his shooting at the traps, had then "gone in" for skeet and later had shared, with other clay-bird enthusiasts, a determination, cost what it might, to have "the real thing." They had formed a club, erected a pretentious club house on a few thousand acres of field and woodland and had imported an English gamekeeper, with several assistants. At this club, bird dogs were maintained to locate released pheasants, and hungry hand-reared mallards were flown over waiting guns en route to the shores of a corn-baited lake.

Strings of dead pheasants and equally dead ducks festooned the club game-room, in consequence. It was apparent that Jay Norton, with other fortunate club members, was simply wallowing in the real thing. What more could any man desire?

Then came a time when the absence of Jay Norton was to be noted at all club shoots—hidden-trap, skeet, pheasant or the gluttonous corn-fed mallard, and this was not all. His disturbed fellow members began to fear that he had forsworn them completely in favor of a strange association, not to say close companionship, with one Pook Roberts—a person of uncertain antecedence and of a rich chocolate hue.

Rumor had it that, morning after morning, the

Witherspoon limousine could be observed rushing along the roads of the vicinity, in various and sundry directions, and always that impeccable car contained its equally impeccable owner and the conversely disreputable Pook. It became a growing wonder. For a time it supplanted the inanities of "The More Abundant Life" as the principal topic of conversation wherever the elite of Westchester County foregathered.

Overhearing several of these discussions, I undertook to solve the mystery, in a quiet way, and have, I believe, succeeded in doing so. The key to the riddle was an hour's talk with Jay Norton himself. I began it by mentioning the mild furor that his abandonment of the shooting club had aroused among the members.

"Don't I know?" he said. "They've been poking and prying at me for a month. Well, it won't get 'em a thing. Let 'em kill half-tame pheasants and barnyard puddle ducks and not bother me."

"What about this colored man you seem to be paling with these days?" I probed gently. "What's the idea?"

"Huh!" snorted Jay Norton. "The damned old buzzard!" Whereupon he proceeded to disclose the chains that bound him to the humble, ingenuous-

seeming Pook. I shall reveal them, link by link, quoting the victim only now and then.

On a fatal day, during the preceding shooting season, Jay Norton, it seemed, had been invited into the coverts of Morris County, New Jersey, by a business acquaintance in New York, and there had come under the insidious spell of the North American woodcock, or timberdoodle. I say "spell," fully realizing that it fails, pitifully, to indicate the true character of the feverish malady that inflicts certain unfortunates when this long-billed pop-eyed visitor drops out of the moonlit sky into the winking silver of hoar-frosted grasses, to exhume worms from, and sketch whitewash patterns upon, the loamy floor of a local thicket.

"Spell," somehow suggests quietness, lassitude, dreamy inertia. Far from quiet, far from inert, are those who dash from one piece of cover to the next, to fight through undergrowth and peer through flaming curtains of autumn leaves in the hope of glimpsing a flicker of tan-and-sepia at which to point a gun and press a trigger as an elusive timberdoodle flutters up in unpremeditated flight.

What is the peculiar fascination of this bird for the rapt gunner who pursues him in preference to any other game bird? I do not know. As to woodcock

shooting, I can either take it or let it alone. Not so the true addict. He will neglect wife, children and his means of livelihood in satisfying his craving to pursue and shoot at this flitting, feathered will-o'-the-wisp of birch and alder thickets.

All this must be borne in mind in considering the case of Jay Norton. He had contracted woodcock-itus, if I may call it such, in its most virulent form. That one day in Morris County coverts had been enough. The man was undone!

It must also be noted that his companion on that never-to-be-forgotten day had been the possessor of a woodcock dog whose performance warmed the cockles of one's heart like a noggin of vintage Burgundy. He was a perfect bird dog who slipped through the cover as a yacht cleaves the waves and found and pointed woodcock until Jay Norton had shot away two boxes of shells and the shadows of evening interrupted the proceedings.

To show that the man went suddenly and completely mad, it is only necessary to say that he tried to buy the dog, then and there. The astonished owner, looking at Jay Norton more in pity than in anger, had led him gently and with soothing words to the automobile and had driven him swiftly homeward.

"We'll let it pass," he told the mortified Jay Norton. "You got over-excited."

Jay Norton's thoughts, through the following winter and summer, were largely devoted to the new-found ecstasy that had come into his life. In a practical way he sought out a certain game warden residing in White Plains and persuaded the minion of the law to accompany him on numerous tours of the surrounding country during which the warden pointed out various pieces of woodcock cover and Jay Norton drew maps.

As the shooting season approached the all-important question of a dog grew more and more pressing. Jay Norton had discovered, to his dismay, that the proverbial hen's tooth was a fairly abundant article of commerce compared to a really good woodcock dog. "You hear of one, every now and then," an honest gun-dog dealer informed him, "but try and buy him." Alas, Jay Norton had already attempted to do so. He shuddered at the recollection.

Once again, however, the patient game warden came to the rescue. He disclosed the fact that, about six miles out from Scarsdale, on a certain highway, you made a left-hand turn at a schoolhouse, turned left again at a woods road just beyond a red barn, followed the woods road for about half a mile and

thus came to a shack standing in a small clearing, surrounded by swamp land and thickets. This shack, with an acre or so of clearing, would prove to be the domain of Pook Roberts, who, the warden assured Jay Norton, hunted woodcock, kept a dog or two and would sell anything.

Following directions carefully, Jay Norton succeeded in coming upon an elderly colored citizen immediately in the rear of the designated shack. With his arm encircling a tin wash-basin of cracked corn, he was scattering its contents upon the ground while emitting a steady "chuck, chuck, chuck" at a rapidly approaching circle of nondescript hens. On the warped boards of the rear porch lay a dog. He was a sort of brickish color, according to Jay Norton, splotched here and there with dirty white. One would have called him a setter, no doubt, with perhaps a trace of farm shepherd. Jay Norton, eyeing this specimen doubtfully, addressed the earnest chicken-feeder.

"Are you Pook Roberts?"

"Yes-suh. Chuck, chuck, chuck, chuck!"

"My name is Witherspoon."

"Yes-suh, I know who you is."

"I'm looking for a good woodcock dog."

"Yes-suh. Chuck, chuck, chuck, chuck!"

"I heard you might have one."

Pook searched the wash basin with a black paw for the last of the cracked corn, went to the paintless ramshackle back porch, hung the wash basin on a nail and opened the rear door of the shack.

"Hyar, Lady. Hyar, Lady," he called.

Out of that forlorn doorway stalked a creature that made Jay Norton catch his breath. It was, he admitted, the best-looking setter bitch that his amazed eyes had ever beheld—"a picture setter" that stood with a proud head and a slowly waving plume of a tail, to favor Jay Norton with a queen-like stare.

"Is—is—she a woodcock dog?" he managed to ask.

Pook emitted a prolonged chuckle.

"Man, man!" he said.

"Do you want to sell her?"

"Sell her!" echoed Pook in a tone of grieved astonishment. "Lawd, no!"

There it was again, thought Jay Norton. No buying the good ones!

"Have you got any more?" he asked, despondently. No other dog could possibly interest him, he felt, with that statuesque figure still filling his eye.

"Jus' ole Joe."

"What's he like?"

Pook chuckled again. "Shuh, a man like you wouldn't have ole Joe aroun'."

"Could I see him?"

"He's layin' right befo' yo' eyes," said Pook, indicating the hopeless near-setter still devoting himself to twitching dream-filled slumber, broken, now and then, by the pursuit of the ubiquitous flea.

Jay Norton gave the dog a brief glance, then dropped his hand on the head of the noble bitch who had strolled to the edge of the porch. Was there, he pondered, any possible argument that would induce a man, black or white, millionaire or pauper, to part with such as she? He decided there was not.

"Well," he sighed, "if you won't sell this one, I might as well be going."

"It looks like it," agreed Pook. "It looks like no man in his right mind would want to give up what it would take to separate me fum Lady."

Jay Norton, who was turning to leave, was suddenly nailed to the spot.

"How much?"

The meeting came to order and got down to business. As a result of its activities it was agreed that Jay Norton should arrive at his present whereabouts on the first morning of woodcock season and, after a

day's hunt over Lady, should, if she proved up to Pook's veiled hints, bear her home with him, to have and to hold, for better or for worse, till death should them part, leaving behind him, in her stead, the sum of \$250.

Jay Norton was to be congratulated, I think, over the clause in the contract that assured his seeing the bitch work before the money changed hands. It proved this much, at any rate: her beauty had not entirely robbed him of what some of his associates claim is an over-cautiousness in fiscal matters.

"I feel right sad," mourned Pook. "I sho' is goin' to miss castin' my eyes ovah that Lady."

"She hasn't shown me what she can do on birds yet," Jay Norton reminded him.

This time Pook allowed himself a high cackle of laughter.

"Man, man, if you don't kill yo'self the limit by noon, you go on home and leave her be."

That night Jay Norton's dreams, he confessed to me, were filled with visions of the wonder bitch pointing again and again, somewhere in his safely mapped woodcock covers, while he shot in the grand manner that one might expect from the owner of such a creature.

On the morning of the opening day he presented

himself, eagerly, at Pook's abode. Presently they set forth, accompanied by Lady and—Jay Norton noticed—the repulsive inhabitant of the back porch.

"The other dog is coming along," he informed Pook.

"He is, sho' enough," said Pook, with a start. "Well, it's jus' ole Joe. He won't git in the way." Whereupon he plunged abruptly into an all but impenetrable alder thicket some hundred yards or so in the rear of the shack.

It was, Jay Norton affirmed, about the thickest piece of cover he had ever been in. To make matters worse, the ancient negro, who had hobbled creakingly across the small opening to its edge, now developed an agility that was surprising. Do what he could, Jay Norton could not hold himself in line with the suddenly rejuvenated Pook as he slid, in eel-like fashion, through the crowding mass of alders. Always Pook and the dogs were ahead, somewhere, just out of sight of the sweating, anxious Jay Norton. At last he heard Pook's voice raised in abrupt command.

"You, Lady, careful now! Whoah, I say!"

Jay Norton, working along as best he could through the obscuring riot of alders, received an exhilarating bit of information a moment later.

"Point, Mistah Withaspoon. Right ovah hyar, suh. Looks like she's got a woodcock."

Jay Norton fought his way toward the sound of the voice and came upon Pook. Directly ahead of him stood Lady in a soul-stirring pose. He was not, he swears, conscious of the presence of the other dog. He saw only the glorious bitch, stiff as a ramrod, and the waiting Pook.

A woodcock twittered up. Jay Norton fired. So, an instant later, did Pook.

"Lady, fetch! Lady, fetch!" Jay Norton heard.

The bitch swam forward like a swan into a mass of undergrowth, to reappear with the dead bird which she dropped, with elegance, into Pook's outstretched palm. And that, as Jay Norton put it, was that.

They proceeded, without leaving the fastnesses of that alder thicket—there seemed to be miles of it—to kill the limit. Old Joe, as Pook had promised, did not, at any time, "get in the way." Only once did Jay Norton become aware that he had any interest whatsoever in woodcock. Having struggled to Pook's side upon one of his declarations of "Point, Mistah Withaspoon," he found Joe's nose slightly ahead of Lady's.

"You, Joe!" said Pook, reproachfully. "What

you doin'? Doan' you lemme ketch you tryin' to steal her point that-a-way. Back whar you belong!"

Jay Norton was faintly astonished to observe the shabby setter slink, apologetically, to the rear.

By eleven o'clock that morning it was all over. The Witherspoon limousine was making its way, regardless of possible scratches on its satiny mudguards and body, out the woods road toward the state highway. On the back seat of the car Lady, the woodcock queen, posed in all her grandeur.

Pook had been left counting, for the third time, a number of bills whose total, he was making certain, was the sum of \$250. Old Joe slept peacefully in a patch of sunlight on the weathered boards of the back porch.

Three days later the selfsame limousine reappeared in that woods road, heading, even more recklessly, toward the former home of the magnificent Lady, who again was gracing the rear seat. In explanation I shall quote Jay Norton verbatim.

"I hunted her for two days," he told me, "and she pointed stink-birds, mud-turtles, meadow-larks, rabbits, squirrel tracks, stray cats, snakes—everything but woodcock. On top of that, she must have pointed five hundred times at nothing. She'd sooner point than eat. She fancied herself doing it. She

thought it made her look nice. And by God, it didn't mean a thing! Two hundred and fifty smackers and it didn't mean a thing! He'd put it over on me in that damned alder patch. It came to me when I found out what a phony she was.

"This Joe was hell on wheels—better than the Jersey dog—and he understood every word the old nigger said. When he found a woodcock, that female four-flusher came up and backed or false-pointed or something, and that old black so-and-so had Joe slide out of the picture so it looked good when I got there. If we killed the bird, he let her retrieve. She'd do that, all right. I'd simply paid two-fifty for a retriever."

To return abruptly to the scene of action: Jay Norton piled from the car and confronted Pook.

"You sold me the wrong dog," he declared. "I want the other one!"

"Shuh!" said Pook. "Doan' tell me you want ole Joe!"

Jay Norton made it clear that Joe was exactly what he did want and that he proposed to get him.

"Here's your bitch," he said. "We'll just exchange."

Pook devoted a moment to scratching his kinky gray dome.

"Well, suh, Mistah Withaspoon," said he at last. "I aim to do right by everybody, but a man's got to think about hisself some too. You bought one dog an' paid the money, an' hyar you is talkin' about another. Ole Joe ain't Lady egzactly. He ain't got the style. Lots of folks might kind of look down on ole Joe. But he suits me. I knows his ways, an' he knows mine. I don't rightly see how I could let him go."

Once more business matters absorbed the meeting. As a result, Jay Norton left Lady and a hundred dollars and again drove away. This time he told himself that, at a price, he had secured the real thing, for old Joe was crouching uneasily just behind him amid the too-luxurious appointments of the speeding limousine.

Woodcock shooting, in Westchester and surrounding counties, is largely a matter of working a small piece of cover and then going on to another. Jay Norton drove, with an eye on his map, to the nearest bit of woodcock ground next morning. Old Joe, still abashed by the splendors of the limousine, slunk from its interior, at command, and promptly found a woodcock, which Jay Norton missed.

The bird left for parts unknown; and since he proved to be the sole member of his species in that particular cover, Jay Norton determined to drive

on. He returned to the car, opened its rear door, and signified that old Joe should enter and there find ease and comfort.

Old Joe looked once at the car and once at Jay Norton before fading from view along a line that would ultimately bring him to the patch of sunshine on the rear porch of the shack on the woods road. That he arrived there safely Jay Norton could not doubt after driving over next morning and observing him stretched contentedly in said patch of sunshine, snapping at an occasional fly that the warmth of Indian summer had encouraged to linger on.

The queen slumbered regally in the doorway. Pook, seated on the single step of the porch, was deep in the picking of a headless, yellow-legged Plymouth Rock cockerel.

"I been kind of expectin' you, Mistah Withaspoon," he said.

Jay Norton grunted.

Pook freed the back of his hands of some clinging, wet feathers and glanced thoughtfully toward the patch of sunlight on the porch.

"Seems like that ole Joe's what you might call a home dog. You got to kind of watch him that-away."

Jay Norton, too moved for utterance, took old

Joe by the collar, led him to the car and plumped him unceremoniously therein. He had a feeling, so he told me, that he was "behind the eight ball again." This suspicion was swiftly verified. Taking old Joe afield that afternoon, he was awed by the speed and certainty with which he found and pointed the three woodcock which the piece of cover contained. Then, as Jay Norton swung toward the waiting car, the dog, with equal speed and certainty, abandoned woodcock hunting in favor of a rapid return to his former abode.

Again and again and yet again Jay Norton went after his three-hundred-and-fifty-dollar investment, and again and again and yet again old Joe left him, when the first cover hunted was cleaned of birds and it was time to move on. Should Jay Norton try to lay guileful hands upon him, once he was out of the car, he departed instantly, to arrive with extraordinary dispatch on Pook's back porch.

That worthy was at last moved to describe the situation in words that struck Jay Norton as shockingly significant.

"It seems like that ole Joe jus' won't stay sold."

Jay Norton eyed him balefully.

"How many other suckers have bought this dog?" he demanded.

Pook concentrated in thought. "All told?"

Jay Norton erupted suddenly. Words that smoked, steamed and sizzled blasted the air about him.

"Calm yo'self, Mistah Withaspoon," Pook advised. "Jus' calm yo'self. Everything is going to be hotsy totsyt."

"How?" Jay Norton wanted to know.

"I figure it this-a-way, Mistah Withaspoon. A man's got to be fair in this world. Fair and square. Ef he hain't, sooner or later he's goin' to git in wrong with his friends and neighbors. A dollah is a dollah—ain' no denyin' that—but a man's got to feel right about how he earns it, or that dollah ain' goin' to do him no good."

"So what?" asked Jay Norton, hopefully.

"Well, suh, the way it is, you ain' gettin' no real satisfaction out of ole Joe—now is you?"

"Hell, no."

"All right. Let him have his way about this kinda wantin' to hang around hyar. I'll keep him foh you at jus' egzactly what it costs me—say fifteen dollahs a month."

"Go on!" said Jay Norton.

"Whenever you want a nice hunt with him, you come on out hyar an' I'll go 'long with you an' see

that ole Joe does his duty by you. I'll charge you egzactly what my time's worth, and not a penny more."

Jay Norton was regarding Pook with much the same look that a rabbit might bestow on an encircling python.

"Go on!" he said again.

"Figurin' my time right down to the bone would bring it to ten dollahs a day."

That the offer was accepted goes without saying. Strong men are weaklings, as I have already intimated, when under the strange enchantment cast by the timberdoodle. Jay Norton summed it up in his later talk with me.

"To get a decent day on woodcock, I've got to take that black highbinder with me and pay him ten bucks; but," he assured me firmly, "legally—legally, mind you—I own old Joe—or do I?"

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The Fall of Mr. Barnstople

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THE FALL OF MR. BARNSTOPLE

HERO worship, in the very young, will, now and then, assume the aspects of a profound mystery. For some entirely incomprehensible reason Bill or Jerry or Mary Ann will select a singularly uninspiring individual on which to bestow a deep if childish loyalty, and will continue to seek out and idolize this dubious object of affection despite reason, ridicule or reproach.

Then, quite as unexplainably, the adored one loses his or her appeal—to the relief of still puzzled elders—and is, for the most part, quickly forgotten.

My own first and most virulent attack of hero worship followed conventional lines except in the last regard. I shall never, I feel sure, forget one—Zeke Barnstople. Furthermore, I can recall the exact hour—yea, the very minute—on which he fell from the heights to the extreme depths of my esteem for reasons that should be clear to such readers as pursue this narrative to its close.

Zeke was a painter and paper hanger—in fact, the painter and paper hanger of our town, since, at that time, ceaseless and all-pervading competition had not made living the desperate affair it is today. There was work for everybody—too much of it, at certain seasons, for Zeke. All spring and summer his paste and paint brushes slap-slapped from dawn till dark in an effort to “oblige folks” who wanted to know just how soon he could get at their house or barn or parlor or spare bedroom that had been let go too long “a’ready.” This was particularly unfortunate since his one great passion could be indulged in only during the warm, bright days when the town clamored at his door and hounded him from “one job of work” directly into another.

Zeke, by instinct and desire, was a fisherman. He talked of catching fish, he dreamed of catching fish; but that was about all. He was forced to discuss bait while dipping a brush into a paste bucket; tackle as he adjusted a painting ladder. Luckily, however, one day of the year, on which fishing could be indulged in, was his. He could be browbeaten into working on Decoration Day—and always was. Christmas, New Year’s, Thanksgiving might find him on a scaffold or bending over a floor; but the day on which his native land commemorated its dedication to freedom

must not find him a slave to paint or paste brush. Bearing one of the axioms of a certain noble declaration in mind, he devoted each Fourth of July to the earnest pursuit of happiness. He went fishing!

Zeke came into my life because of a spring freshening of the interior and exterior of our home. As his paint or paper brightened our clapboards, side walls and ceilings I hovered in the background, at a respectful distance. This was my first observation of manual labor at close range—a fascinating spectacle, I have since observed, to more adult eyes. Furthermore, this particular activity was, I was soon convinced, among the more enviable and higher forms of art. I decided to adopt it as my future calling, forthwith, and longed for the drab and lagging days of youth to speed their passing, bringing me to the stature required to handle a wide paste brush and paste bucket plus a roll of ceiling paper on the dizzy heights of a seven-foot scaffold.

If these were my reflections over the mere hanging of wallpaper, my enthusiasm, a few days later, as I observed the application of delicious-looking cream-yellow paint to porch posts and railings knew no bounds. This, I told myself, was the absolute peak in delightful occupations. My one fear was that

the immense dexterity required in its consummation could never be mine.

Watching a small brush, dipped in rich mouth-watering chocolate follow down a windowpane frame, without leaving a trace of its passage on the glass, my hopes collapsed. A lifetime would not make such miracles possible for me. My admiration of the brush-wielder increased in proportion to my despair of ever approaching his amazing, God-given virtuosity.

Until now I had not ventured to address genius at its task, but this last dazzling exhibition forced admiring exclamations from me, followed by timid questions and more or less preoccupied replies from Zeke. Presently I became aware that he possessed still another attribute, perhaps the rarest of them all. I learned, subsequently, that a not-too-successful operation during an infantile attack of diphtheria had disarranged his epiglottis. The result was that this normally uninteresting organ became, in the throat of the adult Barnstople, a delightful instrument which, when he spoke, produced, at priceless intervals, a musical note not unlike the twitter of an alarmed canary. The sound, if Zeke were either bored or indifferent, was a sort of "tweet." In moments of greater animation it became "tweet, tweet,"

or even, when deep emotion gripped him, "tweet, tweet, tweet."

This disclosure of Zeke's richest gift was too much for me. I surrendered completely. The last course of my midday meal consisting of a substantial wedge of huckleberry pie, I looked at it longingly for a moment, then overcame temptation and galloped with it to the side porch on which I had last seen my new-found hero stretched at ease beside a dented dinner pail. In order to impress him to the fullest, I seized a toy pistol en route and shot him through the heart before presenting him with the wedge of pie.

"Look out—tweet—how you handle that weapon, young fella," he advised.

"I'm ole Cap Collier," I let him know as I lowered the pistol and presented the wedge of pie. "Here, take it!"

Zeke eyed the delicacy with restrained approval.

"Well, now, Cap, just where did you get this here piece of pie?"

"Mother gave it to me," I evaded. "It's for you, Mister Barnstople."

"Now, that's real thoughtful of your Maw, tweet. You thank her kindly for me, Cap."

The wedge of pie changed hands. There followed

an interval devoted by Zeke to unhurried mastication, while I, not without certain unworthy pangs, kept my eyes resolutely away from the absorbing spectacle. At last Zeke brushed some crumbs from his paint-spattered overalls with one hand and removed a dab of huckleberry juice from his stubbled chin with the back of the other.

"Do you ever go fishin', Cap?" he inquired.

I told him that as the result of protracted efforts I had succeeded in extracting several sunfish from the town reservoir.

"Well, now, what do you think of that," said Zeke. "But I was referrin' especial to pickril and bass, tweet."

"Gee," I said, "I'd like to catch a ole pickerel or a ole bass."

"How about me an' you tryin' it some day?"

"Gee, gosh! Mister Barnstople, would you take me?"

"Yep."

"Gee, gosh! When?"

"How'd Fourth of July strike you?"

"Gee, Mister Barnstople, that's more'n a month. Couldn't we go sooner?"

"It don't look like it. It don't look like I'd get a breathin' spell between now and then. I can set right

here and count off jobs I've promised that'll, tweet, bring me right into September."

Cast down for a moment, I brightened at a thought.

"What about Sundays?"

"Six days shalt thou labor, an' do all that thou hast to do," quoted Zeke sternly, "but the seventh is the Sabbath, tweet, of the Lord thy God. J'ever hear that, young fella?"

I admitted some knowledge of the command with which the Deity had seen fit to smite my particular world.

"Well, then, why'd you make a remark like you done? You, tweet, tryin' to lead me astray?"

"Oh, no, Mister Barnstople. Gee whiz!"

"Well, we'll let it pass. You just hold yourself ready for the Fourth."

I gave up with a sigh and considered the ages that intervened between the early part of June and the Fourth of July. Then came a sobering recollection of what that day meant in other transcendent joys. I hastened to put my thoughts into words.

"But, Mister Barnstople, I most generally shoot firecrackers and torpedoes and nigger chasers all day."

Zeke regarded me with thoughtful gravity for a moment.

"Sure enough," he said at last. "Well, everyone to his taste, I expect we'll have to call it off, tweet. J'ever hear of Mud Pond?"

"I know where Darby's Pond is and Round Pond," I boasted.

"I'm not talkin' about Darby's Pond or Round Pond or Chet's Pond or no other pond that everybody knows about, tweet. I'm talking about Mud Pond—tweet—an' I'm askin' you again if you ever heard of it?"

"No, sir; I never did."

"Thought not. Mighty few has. Know what's in Mud Pond?"

"No, sir."

"Pickril as long as you! Tweet!"

"Gee, gosh!"

"Fact—tweet—I seen 'em."

Zeke went on to explain. Mud Pond, he told me, was "spang in the middle" of Holder's swamp—a forbidding stretch of marsh land and thicket some miles to the north. The pond itself was no more than a pot-hole of a few acres surrounded by a thin strip of bog. "Projectin' round up there" during an idle day of the past winter, Zeke had found the pond

covered with a sheet of transparent ice. Gazing down through the broad window of ice into the amber depths below, he had beheld a sight that, as he described it, brought forth a rare double tweet.

"As shore as I'm settin' here tellin' you, Cap," he declared, "they was pickril cruisin' round down there that'd go a yard—tweet, tweet—easy."

Zeke had returned home dazed but full of plans. He "aimed" to go back next day and fish through the ice, until confronted by the thought that he didn't have the proper bait and the grip of winter made access to it impracticable.

"Minnies is what them ole sockarinos wanted, Cap. Minnies or frogs—tweet. But they wusn't no frogs, acourse, an' everything was friz up so tight I couldn't get holt of no minnies. Then right away, before I could get it studied out, tweet, they raised enough money to have the Revrund Honeycut's house papered, an' there I was."

"Gee whiz!" I gasped. "Do you suppose they're still there?"

"You bet they're there. How they goin' to get out? An' I know what they want, this time of year—tweet—minnies! It's like this, Cap. Them pickril got to be that big by wolfn' down frogs. That ther

place is squirmin' with frogs all summer; so I'll give 'em minnies."

"Why not frogs, Mister Barnstople?"

"How does ice cream strike you, Cap?"

"Gosh!"

"Well, what if you had to eat it, tweet, three times a day, an' nothin' else, for six months?"

I contemplated the exquisite thought for a moment, letting its delightful possibilities have their way with me.

"M-m-m!"

"No, sir, it wouldn't be 'm-m-m'; it ud be 'take it away'! You'd get so, tweet, you couldn't look at a plate—chocolate or vanilly or nothin'."

Only my measureless respect for the man, as an artist, kept me silent in the face of this preposterous assertion.

"That's why I'll use minnies for them pickril," Zeke went on. "Frogs has lost their zest. That is, if I can figger a way to get a minnie in where they're at."

"What do you mean, Mister Barnstople?"

"Well, Cap, you can't get to the pond by a good thirty feet on account of it bein' so treacherous all around the edge. Then these here pickril is layin' in a hole forty feet or so beyond that. I been studying

some, and I've got the thing pretty near set. I'll have everything right by the Fourth, tweet. All I'll have to watch out for is one of the big ones pullin' me right on into the pond, tweet, when he takes holt."

"Gee, gosh!"

The one o'clock whistle at the planing mill blew.

"There she goes! We've got to get back on the job." Zeke rose by sections and stretched prodigiously. "Hand me that can of turp, over there on the railing, Cap, like a good fella."

Swelling with pride, I hastened to obey.

Two days later Zeke hailed me from a painting ladder as I reported for duty immediately after breakfast.

"Got it, Cap—tweet. It come to me in the night."

"What did, Mister Barnstople?"

"How to get a minnie in to them pickril. It'll work like goose grease. It puts 'em at my mercy, when the Fourth comes around."

"Oh, Mister Barnstople, take me with you."

"How about, tweet, them firecrackers an' all?"

I hesitated for an instant only. The possible spectacle of Zeke battling to remain on dry land against the remorseless pull of a giant pickerel swept me into emitting words of sacrilege that I had never dreamed could pass my lips.

"What's a lot of ole firecrackers?"

"All right, Cap, tweet. It's a deal!"

In the endless weeks preceding the Fourth, Zeke perfected his plan of attack on the giant pickerel of Mud Pond. His munitions of war consisted chiefly of a stout fifty-yard handline with a short wire leader and a three-ounce oval-shaped sinker. This last was bored from end to end, so that the line could pass freely through it. A swivel prevented the sinker from running down the leader, but a fish could take out line at will, when first seizing the bait, with no suspicious drag to distract him.

Zeke had sent away to a sporting-goods firm for line, leader and sinker. He allowed me to inspect them on the day of their arrival. I then accompanied him into his back yard, where he proceeded to "kind of get his hand in," as he put it. Coiling the line at his feet, he seized the end close to the sinker and produced a gradually increasing whirl, ending in a heave. When a heave at last succeeded in taking out forty yards of line, Zeke favored me with a cunning wink.

"Cap," he said, "we'll teach them pickril not to cough in church!"

On the evening preceding the Fourth, Zeke and I betook ourselves to Skank's Creek, a sluggish stream not far from town to secure the all-important "min-

nies." We were equipped with a seine and a minnow bucket. Zeke wore a pair of hip boots. Scorning such impedimenta, I elected to shed shoes and stockings and go in "barefoot" to handle my end of the seine.

Owing to parental control, going without shoes and stockings was a luxury that was seldom mine. My feet, in consequence, shrank from the unyielding bottom of Skank's Creek. Before enough carefully culled black sucker minnows were secured, my big toes had been stubbed into a state where amputation seemed the only recourse and the bottoms of my feet were stone-bruised to such an extent that each step I took sent a wave of anguish up my body to end with a jolt at the top of my head.

Somehow I managed to limp back to Zeke's to see that the minnows, won at such fearful cost to my underpinning, were safely sunk in a pool in a small spring run just back of his house. I then hobbled homeward, leaving to Zeke the task of borrowing a horse and buggy which would bear us the six miles to Mud Pond the following morning and serve, likewise, for our triumphant return.

The Fourth dawned cloudless and without the faintest breeze. It promised to be a hot day. Getting my shoes on proved to be a matter of sheer will power, and the walk of a quarter of a mile from my

house to Zeke's required something of the same spirit which, some years later, took men up trench ladders, and over the top.

Zeke met me at his door.

"Got some bad news for you, Cap. Everybody's using their rigs for the Fourth. Looks like, tweet, we'll have to step it."

The curious reticence of youth! I remember that standing, so it seemed, on red-hot coals, I only said, "All right, Mister Barnstople."

"What worries me," said Zeke, "is our minnies, tweet. We're goin' to have to freshen 'em up three or four times between here an' the pond, or they're goin' to die on us. We got to take the Ridge Road, an' it's quite a climb down to water anywhere along there. Well, we'd better get started."

How far we had gone along the Ridge Road I can not say—I imagine the Indian Fakirs, who walk unshod on knife blades, are poor judges of distance—when Zeke set down the minnow bucket and began to slap his person, first here, first there, in an unaccountable manner.

"My goodness; tweet, tweet," he said, "I've went and left the sinker back home!"

I promptly moved to a beckoning log and sank down, grateful for the catastrophe that had brought

me a moment of ease. I did not greatly care what its aftermath might be.

"Well, Cap, I got to go back an' fetch it. Let's see how our minnies is makin' out."

Zeke raised the cover of the minnow bucket and peered within. "Spry as crickets, tweet, so far. Now, listen; they ain't goin' to stay that way long when the sun gets up good. You set here in the shade an' watch 'em, Cap. If they begin to come to the top for air, hustle down to the brook an' put fresh water in the can. The brook's down that bank t'other side of them evergreens. It's pretty steep, but you can make it. I'll be quick as I'm able."

I watched Zeke stride back the way we had come, then took up my task of observing the minnows—a black cloud in the confining circle of the minnow bucket. It was not unpleasant sitting there in the shade. The burning of my feet had noticeably subsided when they were no longer forced to bear me onward. Then I heard the faint note of an attacking mosquito and slapped at the sound. One lit on my wrist; another on the back of my hand; an ankle began to itch. In a moment I was the center of a vicious swarm with which I sat and fought a losing battle.

Presently a look into the minnow bucket revealed

a distressing sight. Some of its inmates were at the top of the water, sucking earnestly for air. Even as I watched, others rose and joined them. Picking up the heavy bucket, I limped in the direction of the brook and came abruptly to a minor precipice, its sides panoplied by blackberry vines and second-growth. Far below I could see the gleam of a ribbon of water—so very far below that I decided not to attempt to get down to it. I would wait for Zeke.

An anxious look at the minnows appalled me. The top of the water was a mass of sucking mouths, shot here and there with a streak of silver as a little fish turned, for a moment, on its side before feebly righting itself. With a gasp of mingled determination and despair I plunged down toward the brook, tearing my clothes, scratching my hands and face, but arriving eventually at the blessed water. It was extraordinary what some of that water did to those minnows. I watched their renewed activity with relief before beginning the climb back to the road.

I still wonder why the labors of Hercules did not include an attempt to climb a 60 degree slope, covered with blackberry briars, on a hot July morning, while carrying a three-gallon minnow bucket. A third of the way up I fell on my face. The minnow bucket crashed to earth, the precious water seeking again

the brook from whence it came, to leave a hoard of minnows beating a frantic tattoo against the tin walls of their empty prison.

In a sort of frenzy I picked myself up and, with the minnow bucket, half slid, half fell, back to the brook. Once more I assailed the slope and somehow arrived at the top, on the verge of complete collapse but with a gratifying amount of water still in the minnow bucket. I was still gasping for breath when Zeke appeared.

"What's happened to your face, Cap? It's all over bumps!"

"It must be mosquito bites, Mister Barnstople."

"Well, what scratched you up like that?"

"Blackberry briars, I guess."

"Been berryin' while I was gone, eh? How's the minnies?" Zeke dived for the bucket. "Doin' fine!" he said, with relief. "Did you have to water 'em?"

"Yes, Mister Barnstople."

"Good for you, Cap. Well, let's hustle along."

So we hustled along, and the memory of that journey will be with me till I close my eyes in my last, long sleep. Before it was over I would have gladly sunk into it, then and there. Twice more Zeke was forced to slide down to the brook and climb back with the precious "minnies." At the last he looked as

forlornly brier-scratched, jaded and sweat-bathed as I.

Ultimately our thrilling goal hove in view. We glimpsed Mud Pond, smiling in the sun through willows and high rank grasses. As we came to the edge of its guarding strip of bog all my pains were forgotten. I stood there in the broiling sun, shaking with excitement. My stone-bruised feet and thoughts of the miles they would have to bear me in returning me to my home troubled me not at all. In another moment my dreams of the past month would come true. I would be a close spectator of my hero's combat with, and undoubted triumph over, pickerel of such stupendous size that my imagination had failed to envisage them.

Zeke promptly went into action. Taking the hand-line from his pocket, he coiled it carefully on the ground. Next he threaded the line with his adroitly fashioned sinker and tied the wire leader to the end. He snapped on a hook and selected one of the largest of the minnows, which he impaled, through the lips, thereon.

"All right, tweet. Stand back, Cap, an' gimme room!"

The minnow and three-ounce sinker whirled and whirled again, ever more rapidly. Then Zeke put his

back, his very soul into a breath-taking heave. Minnow and sinker soared out into space. They were followed by the line, yard after yard—twenty yards, thirty, forty—all of it!

Minnow, sinker and line disappeared into the unassailable depths of Mud Pond.

A horrid silence followed the faint splash I had heard as our entire fishing equipment left us, to return no more. It was broken at last by Zeke.

"My, my! tweet, tweet, looks like I overdone it that time, Cap!"

Came another crushing silence in which my heart dropped with a thud to the bottoms of my suddenly aching feet.

Again Zeke spoke.

"No use cryin' over spilt milk. What's done is done. But don't you fret, Cap—I'll tie her to sumpin'—*tweet, tweet, tweet* nex' Fourth of July."

That was the instant in which my admiration for, and unquestioning faith in, "Mister Barnstople" left me as swiftly, with as little chance of returning, as his fifty yards of line had departed from him.

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Lily Belle Gets the Air



THE POINTERS BEGAN TO SOAR BACK AND
FORTH ACROSS THE FIELD.

LILY BELLE GETS THE AIR

It is a rather curious fact that, to most of us, the indescribable satisfaction of owning the perfect bird dog comes but once in a lifetime. If fate wills that this paragon is to be ours during early manhood, we spend the rest of our years trying to possess his equal. If we are blessed with his companionship when the gray has touched our temples and the shooting eye has difficulty with a grouse or a woodcock hurtling through the variegated confusion of autumn foliage, we are apt to feel, for a time, that when he is gone our days afield are over.

Approaching this latter period, after twenty years of searching for another Old Jack—grouse dog extraordinary of my youth—I came to suspect that not only would I never find another like him, but that if I did his efforts might be wasted. If Old Jack was just a retrospection, so were the grouse of yesterday that he had found and held, under any

and all conditions, day in and day out, season after season, as long as there was breath in his body.

There were still ruffed grouse, to be sure. They were descended from those very birds, of blessed memory, that I had frequently kicked out of brush piles or down tree-tops at Jack's rigid insistence; but they had come to possess an almost diabolical knowledge of when and how to take wing, plus the footwork of a suburban cock pheasant. They seemed to know to a yard the killing range of nitro powder and No. 8 shot and the exact purpose of a man with a shotgun who appeared among them on any of the thirty-one rapturous days following October 14. Improbable as it seemed, they appeared to be as well aware of the opening date as I. Prior to that they would burst up at heart-disturbing distances and roar recklessly into open glades or along the edge of the cover—a mark for any tyro to shoot at.

Then came the day of days, and I would venture forth with visions of fan-tailed bombshells nicely set off against the blue of the sky. My dog would make game. He would begin to road cautiously toward an old stone wall. Fifty yards away, on the other side of the wall, a grouse would slip quietly into the air, skim the ground for another fifty yards and

then slice into a hemlock swamp. Later, with cat-briers viciously assailing my legs, a spider-web pasted over one eye, a laurel branch poking into my mouth and nostrils, I would hear his muffled departure somewhere ahead in the gloom of the swamp. His destination, I came to know, was a perch well up in a hemlock tree.

Could Old Jack—master of thickets that he was—have coped with this sort of thing? I began to doubt it. The situation was forlorn. I had given up the hope of finding another super grouse dog, and should I succeed in doing so I doubted his ability to handle birds that were acquiring, more and more as the seasons passed, the distressing habits of a Blue Ridge wild gobbler.

Then a long-legged son of Georgia, who can pick out two cock quail on a covey rise and kill them stone-dead, came up into Yankee land on business and joined me for a day's grouse shooting. At two o'clock he dropped his gun into the hollow of his arm and spoke somewhat as follows: "Listen. What I say is nuts to this. It would take a cross between a so-an'-so jackass and a so-an'-so swamp nigger to relish chasing these so-an'-so ruffled grouse around through cover that you wouldn't have the heart to send a so-an'-so coon dog into. These birds ain't fit

for human society. They can outsmart a mule trader. Which-a-way is the car from here? I reckon I'll go find it and take a load off my feet."

Later, before a birch-wood fire, he again touched lightly on the subject of my favorite form of shooting.

"So you were brung up on these so-an'-so ruffled grouse," he mused. "Well, you've got to go easy with a man when it comes to that kind of thing. It looks like I've got to make allowances about what you like to shoot at, on account of your upbringing; but you come down to Atlanta on January first, and I'll take you into south Georgia and put you on a nice-gaited, sure-footed saddle hoss, with a pair of wide-going pointers out there doing their stuff, and right soon I'll show you something to bang away at that you can really see."

In such fashion was I transplanted to the South. I took my friend at his word. That first trip weaned me from the ultra-suspicious ruffed grouse of the Catskills and started me on a search, for bold, wide-going pointers that one could follow at ease on a saddle horse with a 20-gauge stuck in a scabbard dangling ahead of the right leg and a pleasant Southern sun beaming down on it all.

Those were the days of plenty. I elected to ac-

quire a kennel of such dogs. I was aided and abetted in this undertaking by my friend. With headquarters in Atlanta he acquired, by some method that escaped me, knowledge of most of the gun dogs in south Georgia. If word of a sufficiently promising candidate came to him, we would motor to the county where the dog was owned and spend a day in the field shooting quail over him. Rarely would my friend recommend his purchase.

"Well, he's not a bad sort of a dog," he would opine. "I'd like to see him go up to his coveys a little more bold like, and he don't hunt his ground just to suit me, all the time. Piddles around some—if you noticed. I don't reckon I'd bother with him. Let's get on back to Atlanta."

On the occasion of my first purchase I received a shock. We had spent an exhilarating day shooting over a black, white and ticked pointer that, as my friend confided to me in guarded tones, could do it all.

"Leave the dickering to me," he advised. "You just keep still."

Presently the dog's owner—a share cropper in striped blue denim overalls—my friend, the tired dog and I were grouped at the running-board of my car.

"Right nice little dog," said my friend. "What would you expect to get for him?"

"Wouldn't take a cent less than seventy-five dollars," the share cropper announced firmly.

I doubted that I had heard aright. My impulse was to count seventy-five dollars quickly into a calloused palm and whisk the dog away to Atlanta before his benighted owner came to his senses. I was stupefied to hear my friend emit a loud guffaw and climb into the waiting automobile.

Thirty minutes later we drove away from the share cropper's bare, red-clay front yard and headed for Atlanta. The dog was quietly snoring on the back seat of the car. He had cost me forty-five dollars. In this manner I acquired four dogs—all pointers—and one small, snipe-nosed setter bitch, named Myrtle, whose history I have recorded elsewhere. Seldom does one man own at one time five better quail dogs. The top price that I had paid for any of them was sixty dollars; but my friend pointed out to me that we had been "held up," as he put it, because "the papers went with him."

I had thought that my kennel was now complete and our search abandoned. One evening my telephone rang. It proved to be my friend, who informed me that we were leaving town at six o'clock

next morning to drive to Bainbridge, Georgia, two hundred miles south.

"What for?" I asked.

I had detected a strange, suppressed excitement in the voice I had been hearing. Now it lowered to become hoarsely confidential. "I hear you can buy Decatur Jack."

"So what?" I said.

There were sputterings from the other end of the wire that finally became intelligible. "Listen, Yank. Decatur Jack is a bird dog—what I mean, a bird dog!"

"But I've got five bird dogs now," I reminded him.

"Ain't that awful," said the voice. "He calls them things he's got bird dogs when I'm talking about Decatur Jack."

"Well," I said, "I can't go. I'm meeting a fellow from New York that is getting in on the Crescent. You go down and buy him for me, if you think I ought to have him."

"Ought to have him! Good God A'mighty!"

Words seemed to fail him. I heard the telephone click as he hung up.

At 7:00 P.M. the following evening my friend got out of a mud-spattered car and led a bird dog

to my door. He was a huge, clumsy pointer—pure white except for one pale-lemon-colored ear. His luminous amber eyes were slightly bulging and filled with a sort of humorous tolerance of things in general and me in particular. He gave the impression of being more at home in strange surroundings than any creature I have ever seen. Acknowledging the amenities between host and guest with a swing or two of his club-like tail, he slumped down in front of the drawing-room fire, yawned prodigiously, dropped his big head on his mastiff-like paws and went to sleep.

“Well, there he is—Decatur Jack,” said my friend. “I stole him for you.”

“How much?” I asked absently as I stared at the great dog that suggested a large white calf stretched incongruously before an open fire.

“Four hundred,” said my friend exultantly.

And now my startled eyes left Decatur Jack and swung abruptly to the dispenser of these tidings.

“Four hun—” I began.

“Yep. I’d have given a thousand, if they’d only known it.”

“Why?” I managed to ask.

My friend regarded the sleeping pointer thoughtfully.

"Fooling around up North with those ruffled grouse has kept you from hearing about this dog, but there ain't a bird hunter, from here to Savannah, that wouldn't give his right leg for him. My father-in-law's in town, and Lily Belle will kind of expect me to show the old man around tomorrow, so I won't be able to go with you; but you take this dog out somewhere where there's quail, and that'll save me a lot of talking."

It so happened that I had promised to hunt next day with a bird-dog enthusiast, a real estater by profession, who seldom touched upon the subject of salable property. So far as I had been able to judge, his waking hours were given to disclosing the merits of a pair of pointers which he kept, in a birdy section, near Greenville, Georgia. It was over this pair that we proposed to shoot; but morning found me at the door of his Atlanta home with Decatur Jack asleep on the floor of the car.

"What have you got in here?" demanded the real estater, peering at my recent purchase.

"Dog I just bought," I informed him.

"Any good?"

"I've heard he is. Thought we'd work him some today and find out."

"Sure, sure!" He climbed into the car. "You're

certainly going to see something when we get to Greenville. I'm going to show you a pair of real bird dogs. You're going to love every move they make."

I did not love the first move the male dog of the pair made when we opened the rear door at Greenville to let them into the car. He bristled, drew back his lips and growled ominously at Decatur Jack.

The big pointer lifted his head from the car floor and turned it, to take in the brawler, with great, sleepy amber eyes. He looked at the quarrelsome one with complete indifference for a moment, then dropped his head to the floor again and resumed his nap. The newcomer subsided with a last few muttered curses. It was as though a great gentleman, dozing in a club window, had silenced a vociferous newsboy with a casual stare.

Greenville is not in the flat lands of south Georgia. It is a rolling country which is hunted on foot. We presently stopped at the scene of our first activities—a large billowing field in which two coveys were supposed to reside. As the car door was opened the Greenville pointers shot away and began to soar back and forth across the field like a pair of airplanes.

"Look at 'em go!" their owner exulted. "Can they travel—I ask you?"

"They surely can," I admitted, keeping half an eye on Decatur Jack, despite the pyrotechnics of the other two.

His procedure was exactly as follows: a leisurely rise from the car floor; a lumbering descent from the car; the unhurried lifting of a leg in answer to a call of nature; two vigorous thrusts at the ground with his rear feet; a shake of his body to rid himself, apparently, of the slothfulness engendered by a long motor ride. These things accomplished, he galloped, in a stately fashion and in a straight line, some fifty yards to the left of us and froze abruptly into a point.

All this being unnoticed by the real estater, he continued to observe the flying pair with a gloating eye and extol their virtues.

"Did you," he demanded, "ever see a pair of young dogs cover their ground nicer than those two out there?"

"No," I said, "I never did."

"Did you ever see a faster, wider pair at any age? Now did you?"

"They're fliers, all right."

"Isn't it a real pleasure to see dogs move like that?"

"Yes," I said, "it is. But Henry"—my companion's name was Henry—"when you're tired of watching them go, we might step over here to this white dog and kill some birds."

"What's that?" said Henry. His absorbed gaze tore itself from the distant pair and rested upon the statuesque Decatur Jack, a stone's throw away. "Well, I'll be a—" But what Henry said he'd be I shall not set down upon this fair white page.

That was my introduction to the second of the two great Jacks that have been mine in one short lifetime. On this first day of our association, fourteen coveys were moved. Of these, two were found by Henry's pair, and one was questionable, since all three dogs were on point when we came upon them in a thicket. Decatur Jack went to the eleven other coveys.

I say "went to," because that is literally what he did. He did not hunt, as lesser quail dogs are forced to do. By some God-given attribute of nose or bird sense or judgment of the country he simply moved with only slight variations from a straight line from one covey to the next. How he did it was beyond me. It was still beyond me after I had watched him

performance of these miracles, day after day, for many days.

He never seemed to hurry at his work. When put down, he did not rush away like a mad thing. He was apt to perform the ritual, already noted, before breaking into the tireless, long-striding gallop that took him from covey straight to covey. And yet, in the flat country of south Georgia, where wide fast dogs abound, when he was put down with a speedster for an hour's dash, one was surprised to notice that he was abreast of his brace-mate if the other dog elected to take Jack's direction toward the inevitable covey.

Another of his accomplishments was the way he accommodated himself to the type of country in which he was put down. As a rule, the class dog of the open spaces simply goes out of one's life when hunted in hilly, wooded country. I have sat on a horse and seen Decatur Jack become a dim white speck on the far horizon in south Georgia. I have seen him leave a great wide stretch of splendid quail cover, where birds had heretofore always been found, fight his way through an almost impenetrable patch of briers, thirty yards deep, swim a river, bore through a similar patch of briers on the other bank, work to the top of a steep rise thinly covered with

pine-oak, find a covey and later other coveys that, for some unknown reason, had taken to this sparse hillside. But always he contrived, from time to time, to be in sight. That brain of his had easily discovered the simple fact, hidden from so many shooting dogs, that birds fall only when a man is there with a gun.

To this discovery of his I owe a triumphant vindication. A certain editor of an outdoor magazine, which shall be nameless, has put in many weary hours listening to rapt enthusiasts burble of their shooting dogs. The certain editor has, in consequence, become skeptical, not to say hard-boiled, in his attitude toward Shot or Dan or Fanny, whose work he has never had the doubtful pleasure of observing.

Having spent a season in the South shooting over the wonder dog that a kind providence had placed in my hands, I returned north for the summer. While spending a day on a trout stream with the editor in question I proceeded to grow lyrical over the big white wizard and all his works. I was checked in the middle of my panegyric by a look of pain on the editorial countenance. Obviously, the man was suffering.

"All right," I said. "I'll have him shipped to Honga next fall, and prove it."

By "Honga" I meant the Honga River Gun Club,

on the eastern shore of Maryland, of which both the editor and I are members. It is primarily a duck club, but there are some two thousand acres of land on which, during spells of bluebird weather, we do a casual bit of quail shooting.

The following November saw me fulfill my promise. A day came when the editor and I met at Honga. Decatur Jack was safely in the club kennels. The editor was gripped by such enthusiasm at the prospect of shooting over the dog that he killed ducks until lunch time and then took a nap until three o'clock in the afternoon.

I must confess to some misgiving as I let Jack out of his runway and waved him toward a small open field in the immediate foreground. Accustomed to the limitless sweeps of south Georgia, what would he do in this new cramping country where small fields were crowded on all sides by pine woods and briery thickets? Would he simply disappear from view to strengthen the editor's suspicion that all men are liars where their own bird dogs are concerned?

What he did was to stay exactly within the confines of this miniature course and go, in one hour and forty minutes, almost as the crow flies, from one covey of quail to the next, until he had found nine. We lost sight of him only once. This was on the last

covey. We stumbled on him, holding these birds, when it was too dark to shoot. I think I should add that, over this same ground, the average bird dog could be expected to find four or five coveys in a full day's hunt.¹

It is worthy of note, I think, that from that day on the certain editor is quite liable to cause significant, not to say injured, looks to pass between other members of the circle when it is his turn to hold forth at a dog-fanning bee and he decides to recall his short afternoon with Decatur Jack.²

Came the depression. I suddenly found myself unable to roam the country at will, nor could I longer maintain a kennel of quail dogs for south Georgia shooting, when, so far as I could see, trips to south Georgia were things of the past. I got rid of all but one dog and crawled back to up-state New York, taking a too-rusty pen and Decatur Jack with me.

But grouse season arrives, even for hard-driven writers, and the grouse, I knew, were just outside my study window. On an opening day the white pointer and I set forth. What he would do with grouse on rocky, brier-infested, laurel-ridden mountainsides I had not the faintest idea.

¹ Editor's Note: To the preceding paragraph, check and double-check. Ray P. Holland.

² Editorial confession: Too true! R. P. H.

He lumbered off. Presently a grouse flushed fifty feet ahead of him.

"You, Jack!" I called. "Whoah! Careful!"

He stopped and looked at me with no sign of apology. He simply observed me with his characteristic amused tolerance. I think he had acquired that look early in life, when his first owner, whoever he may have been, attempted to show him where to find quail. The look in this instance seemed to say, "My dear fellow, is that what you want to shoot at—animated hens? Well, really! Still, if that's your idea, we might as well get at it."

He proceeded to go to grouse without the slightest hesitation, point them and, in many cases, hold them until they got out almost under my feet when I came up. If his work on quail had filled me with awe, now I was completely bewildered. A slight, ghost-like setter bitch that had been my most recent grouse dog had crept soundlessly to her points and had rarely succeeded in given me a decent shot. And here was this great calf of a dog plunging off-handedly through the cover and nailing ruffed grouse with a lack of finesse that was almost brutal.

Later, as I thought it over, I felt that I had solved the mystery. The fact that Jack the Second did not make game or road or hesitate over locating

a bird did the trick. Going to a grouse with the same bee-line directness that took him to a covey of quail, he stopped—and there was the crouching bird, too befuddled to fly. The dog overcame cunning with boldness. He didn't give those Catskill grouse time to think.

At any rate, my second Jack afforded me something like the shooting I had enjoyed in thickets of long ago with that other Jack of cherished memory, and I had found a dog, after all, who could handle that distrustful sophisticate in feathers—the modern ruffed grouse.

A year sped by, as years do. Once more the long-legged son of Georgia ventured north. Meeting him in New York, I suggested that he come up to the Catskills with me for a few days' shooting.

"At ruffed grouse?" he inquired.

"Yes," I said. "I want you to see the big white dog handle them."

"You don't mean to say you've got him doing it too?"

I nodded.

He shook his head mournfully. "Well," he said, "I always did think he had more sense than any man I ever saw, but I reckon being around you steady has kind of weakened his mind."

"Come for a day at least," I urged.

"Can't," he said. "Lily Belle has been sort of poorly here lately. I've been worried about her. Gotta get back."

Expressing the hope that the wife of his bosom would soon be enjoying her usual good health, I continued to urge him.

"I'd like to see the big dog again," he admitted at last, "and find out what you've done to him. I'll fool around with you for just one day. I can still take it, I reckon."

At about 9:15 the following morning, Decatur Jack banged into a point on a big cock grouse that had ventured out among the blackberry briars in an old apple orchard. The bird roared up and swung back toward the hemlocks. My friend's gun spoke and the grouse crumpled in mid-flight as though every bone in his body had been broken, leaving a cloud of feathers to float languidly down into the tangle of briars. Jack, for some reason, brought the bird to my friend. He took it from that great pink mouth, smoothed its plumage, then put it into his hunting coat without a word.

At approximately 9:45, Jack pointed again among some beech trees on a mountainside. My friend advanced toward the dog. From a welter of

lichen-covered rocks and clumps of laurel a grouse shot almost straight up. It reached the higher branches of the beech trees like a rocket and was leveling for a sail off among the tree-tops when it folded in mid-air and fell like a plummet almost at our feet.

My friend broke his gun, slipped a shell into the right barrel and picked up that very dead bird. Again he smoothed bronzed feathers into place, gently and in silence. Becoming aware that Decatur Jack was observing him with a more than usual amount of amusement, the son of Georgia spoke.

"The big so-an'-so thinks something is funny around here," he said, "and he's looking right at me." His eyes dropped to the dead bird he was still absently stroking. They lifted to give me a somewhat embarrassed look. "Listen, is there a little place, close about, I could rent for a month? I kind of think some of this mountain air might do Lily Belle a lot of good."

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The Diver Takes to Pinochle

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I WATCHED THE DIVER SPIN, TWIRL AND
STAGGER DOWNSTREAM.

THE DIVER TAKES TO PINOCHLE

THERE are few certainties in the nebulous art of angling. Any hour—any day—your fondest theory may explode in your face. Having been assured by long experience that the dry fly is of no avail in early spring, there will come a day—it may be snowing gently at the time—when you consign a floater to the unbroken surface of a pool just to see it ride. Instantly a trout rushes up from icy depths and takes it. So, later, do many of his equally benighted brethren.

You go home with the left shoulder sagging pleasantly under the weight of a heavy creel, determined to return and do likewise on the morrow. Alas, no single trout deigns to notice a dry fly on the following day, or on any other day that April. As a matter of fact, eighteen or nineteen years may pass before the patient casting of dry flies on various streams in early spring puts anything to speak of in the frying pan.

Now let us suppose you have been persuaded by excellent authorities that it is not the color or type of fly that matters; it is the method of presenting it that is the controlling factor in bringing home the bacon. Comes a morning when your few chosen patterns, no matter how artfully offered, get you exactly nothing. In desperation you dig out of the lunch pocket of your fishing coat the old fly box—a relic of the days when you spent a greater part of your time changing flies.

You open up this miniature steamer trunk and gaze at its contents in dismay. What an appalling collection of bedraggled relics! You select perversely the worse-looking specimen of the lot—a huge bilious-looking bottle-washer—and cast it listlessly upon the water. You are startled into a premature strike by seeing two brown trout heading earnestly for this synthetic titbit from opposite directions.

A field day follows. All the yellow bottle-washers in the old fly box are used up. That evening you telegraph for more. You await their arrival in a frenzy of impatience. They come. You dash for the stream with a full two dozen of the precious things and lay one cunningly upon your favorite pool. Nothing happens. Nothing continues to happen all that day and the next and the next.

From then on, as the seasons pass, you give the good old yellow bottle-washer a tryout now and then. It is just ten years later when at last a nine-inch brookie gathers it in. Looking at the fish after it is netted, you discover that he is blind in one eye.

This sort of thing is pretty discouraging to those of us who like to know at all times just where we stand. It is all but disastrous to the reputation of the expert. I know a man—a scientific fellow—who has devoted a lifetime to an exhaustive study of all varieties of trout from egg to creel. Less distinguished anglers now agree that no man who has ever lived can hope to rival him in the number of things he knows about fish and fishing that aren't so.

Despite the hopelessness of trying to determine definitely when or why trout will or will not rise on any given day, the years will indubitably bring to any persistent angler certain precepts that he can safely rely on. He will learn, for example, that any trout which reaches the respectable length of fourteen inches can, in the twinkling of an eye, add noticeably to his dimensions. He does this by simply giving a glimpse of himself as he rises to a fly which he does not take. From that instant he becomes in the mind of the beholder and in the recounting of the episode afterwards "about sixteen inches."

On the other hand, a similar fish can also shrink. He need only take the fly and later be displayed to a fellow angler as he stretches his now curiously unimpressive length in the grassy depths of the creel. An indifferent inspection will invariably be followed by "close to thirteen."

These, as I have already suggested, are among the certainties of angling. I shall now endeavor to recall the time, the place and the manner of my learning yet another of the few indisputable truths that are within the knowledge of most experienced trout fishermen.

In the late spring of a distant year—fifteen springs have passed since then—The Pelican, or Great Diver, had accompanied me, at my suggestion, to the Ausable River. We proposed to devote a month to the pursuit and capture of brown, rainbow and native trout in that notably treacherous stream.

It was early in our association—so early, in fact, that I had not fished the Ausable heretofore and The Diver had not yet acquired the proud title that has ever since been his. I bestowed it on him at supper one evening on our return from a particularly appalling stretch of rocks and fast water. He had spent the greater part of the day, so it seemed to me, below the surface.

"Kid away, Oscar," he said, "but here's a thought: I get wet and I get fish."

Since his creel that evening had been twice as heavy as mine, I allowed the nice distribution of some ketchup over a mound of baked beans to absorb my attention for a time. At last I rallied.

"Sooner or later you're going to break an arm or a leg or your fool neck."

I spoke lightly, to be sure, but not without certain inner trepidations. Any day, I felt, my prophecy might be fulfilled. Even now I cannot understand why, as the years have passed, The Diver continues his headlong career, up and down a multitude of rivers, still entirely regardless of where he sets his feet and still singularly hale in wind and limb.

I went to bed that night, I remember, troubled by the thought that I had introduced The Diver to the most precarious wading I had ever encountered, and shuddered as I recalled that the man had a wife and children. I was in no wise relieved next morning as I watched him spin, twirl and stagger downstream in the wake of a good-sized rainbow that he had succeeded in hooking. Unable to bear the spectacle longer, I made my way to a pool farther up the river, the bottom of which was not quite so diabolical as the stretch which The Diver had elected to fish.

I caught nothing in the next few hours. My failure, I felt, was due to lack of concentration. How could a man fish who wondered steadily between casts whether or not his companion was by now a bruised corpse lying somewhere in the turmoil of Ausable Gorge?

I was doubly cheered, however, to find, when I joined The Diver for lunch, that he was both alive and fishless.

"Skunked," he informed me as he stood and dripped. "Just one of those days."

"What became of the rainbow that had you in tow when I left?" I asked.

"Tore out. Haven't had a rise since."

The rest of that day was also blank. So likewise were several days that followed. We cast our arms off without reward. The trout of the Ausable appeared to have become definitely opposed to the idea of sustenance. The mere thought of food seemed repugnant to them.

We shook our heads despondently over the situation each evening and sweated and cast in vain each day, but—and this is one of the mysteries of the anglers' world—in our heart of hearts we were not unduly depressed. Your ardent troutster needs only water that he knows contains fish to remain reason-

ably contented. The practice of his art and an ever-present hope will sustain his indescribable inner glow for days on end.

My chief anxiety continued to be The Diver. His efforts seemed to increase as the fishing got worse. They became so spectacular that tight-rope walking on a high wire appeared eminently safe compared to some of his pyrotechnics in midstream.

I suggested that we try the Beaverkill or the west branch of the Delaware, but The Diver refused to go elsewhere.

"When it's dead," he informed me, "it's dead all over. This is a sweet piece of water, Gus. Interesting. Keeps a guy on his toes."

"You mean nose, don't you?"

"Just a kidder. Just a born kidder."

One morning as I climbed out of a pool I came face to face with an acquaintance and fellow angler whom I had failed to encounter that season on any of his chosen rivers.

"Didn't see you on the Broadhead or the Esopus," I said.

"Nope," said he. "Been in Maine." Whereupon he proceeded to relate a tale involving a certain northern lake and stream that held me spellbound.

"Never," he wound up, "have I dreamed of such fishing. Never. It was simply unbelievable."

"Listen," I said. "I've got no right to ask you, but I'm going to. Just where is it, and how do you get there?"

I was both pleased and dumbfounded at the alacrity with which he confided to me the precious knowledge I was seeking. Then a thought gave me pause.

"Why did you leave it and come here?" I demanded.

He was wading into the pool I had just quitted, stripping out line for his first cast.

"Too many fish," he said, and shot his fly expertly out upon the surface.

Now this was an upright citizen of unquestioned probity whose word was as good as his bond. Too many fish! I was deeply stirred. I had never been where there were too many fish. I doubted the possibility of there being anywhere on the globe a body of water containing, so far as I was concerned, too many fish. Furthermore, here was a chance to distract The Diver from his present hazardous undertakings and bear him off to less spectacular angling. I dashed downstream, summoned him from the river,

and proceeded to set his soul aflame by repeating the pregnant phrase I had just heard.

"But listen, Hubert," said he, with a last shre of caution, "maybe this guy's giving you the run around."

"Not a chance. I've known him for years. Yo can bank on anything he says."

"Too many fish, eh! How do we get there?"

"Drive five hundred miles and take a boat up th Penobscot, then go in by buckboard. The boat run once a week."

"Mere detail. If the boat isn't there, we'll swim.

Some few days later The Diver and I followed buckboard and plodding team around the final bend of a 20-mile trail and came at last to the lake of our seeking. It lay like a great rose-colored mirror, between three purple mountains, in the last of the day's sun.

Having walked eighteen of the twenty miles sooner than submit to the inevitable spinal fracture that riding in that buckboard over that trail would have entailed, we now stood at gaze like weary pilgrims whose eyes at last behold the towers of Mecca.

Our host, who was driving the buckboard, broke in upon our ecstatic contemplations. "Well, boys—

there she is," he said. "Better get in and ride now. It ain't so bad from here to camp."

We climbed into the buckboard and clung to the seat and one another as the dauntless vehicle negotiated the last mile of that unspeakable trail. Presently we arrived at "Camp Killkare." A row of log cabins with rustic porches along a shore of the lake.

We drove past—according to birchbark signs—Wildwood Cabin, Sunrise Cabin, Lakeview Cabin and so came at last to Moonbeam Cabin, where the tired team halted promptly at command.

"We're putting you boys here in Moonbeam," our host informed us. "We eat in Waldorf—the big one in the middle. Supper'll be in thirty minutes. You'll find soap and water and towels inside if you want to kind of freshen up."

The Diver, unloading duffel and heaving it on to the front porch, was keeping a dreamy eye on the lake.

"Have we got time to wet a line before supper?"

"Sure, if you're a mind to."

We dived simultaneously for rod cases.

"Where is the best place to fish around here?" I inquired.

Our host indicated the entire shore line with a sweeping gesture.

"Just anywhere. You might keep a few if you're trout hungry. The other boys don't fish so much here lately."

The Diver's hurried efforts to assemble his rod ceased abruptly. He became suddenly rigid, a rod joint in either hand.

"Why not?" he inquired.

"Well, they've sort of took up pinochle."

"Pinochle!" The Diver spat out the word as though ridding his mouth of something both poisonous and decayed.

"Yes, sir; they tell me it's a real interestin' game. Well, I gotta get the team put up. See you at supper."

The buckboard with its patient roan and sorrel bore him away.

We stood gazing at each other in sickening silence. It was broken at last.

"So we come nine thousand miles because your friend Baron Munchausen wanted the Ausable to himself." The Diver laughed.

As though it were an echo of that despairing laughter, a loon's hideous cackle came to us from somewhere out on the lake.

The effect of my eighteen-mile walk hit me like the kick of a mule. I became one big ache.

"Maybe they aren't fishermen," I falter

"Then why did they come here?"

I could think of no answer to that unaquestion.

"Zeke," said The Diver, "we've been
Come on, I'll prove it."

He stalked grimly to the edge of the lake and made a first cast, with two sizable wet flies, into that sheet of painted fairy-like water. An instant boil disturbed the brooding surface.

"Socko!" said The Diver. "Come to papa!"

Shortly thereafter he carefully netted two native trout that seemed to have been poured from the same mold. They were beautiful, richly colored fish about twelve inches long.

"This," said The Diver, "is the life. Take a shot at it, George!"

I hastened to obey. A similar boil. A brief struggle. I netted twin brothers. The Diver's pair and mine were apparently quadruplets.

And now The Diver cast again.

"Socko!"

He failed to use his net on this pair. They were simply dragged out on the small flat beach from which we were fishing. "I'm sending the Baron a

dozen flies for Christmas," he informed me. "Or maybe he'd like a nice two-piece rod."

Then I cast.

"Don't keep those two," said The Diver as I beached the resulting double. "We've got six already." His wrist flicked—the flies settled on the surface. Came the unescapable boil. But now the exultant "Sockol!" was not heard. It remained unuttered while twenty minutes passed and there was no variety to our proceedings, or to the number and size of the trout we took. "Sockol!" was out.

At last The Diver desisted. He turned a troubled eye my way.

"Let's move on away from here, Al. They're ganging us."

So we moved fifty yards along the shore. I cast. Two trout exactly like the ones we had taken further down the lake!

The Diver cast. Ditto! He unhooked this last pair and watched them shoot like twin torpedoes into protecting greeny depths.

"Just two little Moonbeams entirely surrounded by fish. What'll we do?"

"Maybe the stream's different," I suggested.

"That's a thought," The Diver brightened. "We'll try her in the morning."

A tinny whanging now smote the air. It came, we discovered, from the front porch of Waldorf, where a stout woman was belaboring a dishpan with significant gusto. We moved in silence toward the sound.

Presently we encountered half a dozen card players, their head-gear decorated with a varied assortment of flies, in a deer-antlered living room. They looked up as we entered, mumbled greetings, and joined us without enthusiasm at the supper table.

"We've been fishing the lake," said The Diver as he placed a paper napkin across his knees. "It's got us down. I don't see how a piece of water can hold that many trout."

An erstwhile card player who had just forked a piece of cold tongue from a platter held his trophy poised in mid-air and sighed heavily.

"Until you fish the stream, brother, you ain't seen nothin'." The slab of tongue was slapped down and inspected. "Somebody pass the mustard."

Despite this disheartening pronouncement, early morning found The Diver and me heading for a lumber dam at the foot of the lake over which spilled the water that formed the stream. Working our way out to the middle of the apron of the dam, we observed the top pool of a merry little river that

wound away from us through alders and white birch and pine. The quiet pool at our feet, unbroken by ephemeral tell-tale rings, showed not a sign of life.

"Nothing rising," said The Diver with strange satisfaction.

As he prepared to make his initial cast his fly swung from his rod tip over the pool some six or seven inches from the surface. The fly dangled there for an instant. A trout hurled itself out of the water at the fly. The fish fell back with a splash as another hurtled into the air, and another, and then another. In a moment there was a sort of perpetual fountain of trout below that fly, none of which managed to reach it.

The Diver watched this extraordinary piscatorial upheaval in silence. At last he spoke.

"Back to the Ausable for us. When does that boat come up the Penobscot again?"

"Not until Wednesday."

The Diver thought this over. "Ever play pinochle, Archibald?"

"No."

"Well, here's where you're going to learn."

Thus I discovered one of the few axioms of fly-fishing. Life can be pleasant with the creel still empty, but "too many fish" cannot be long endured.

